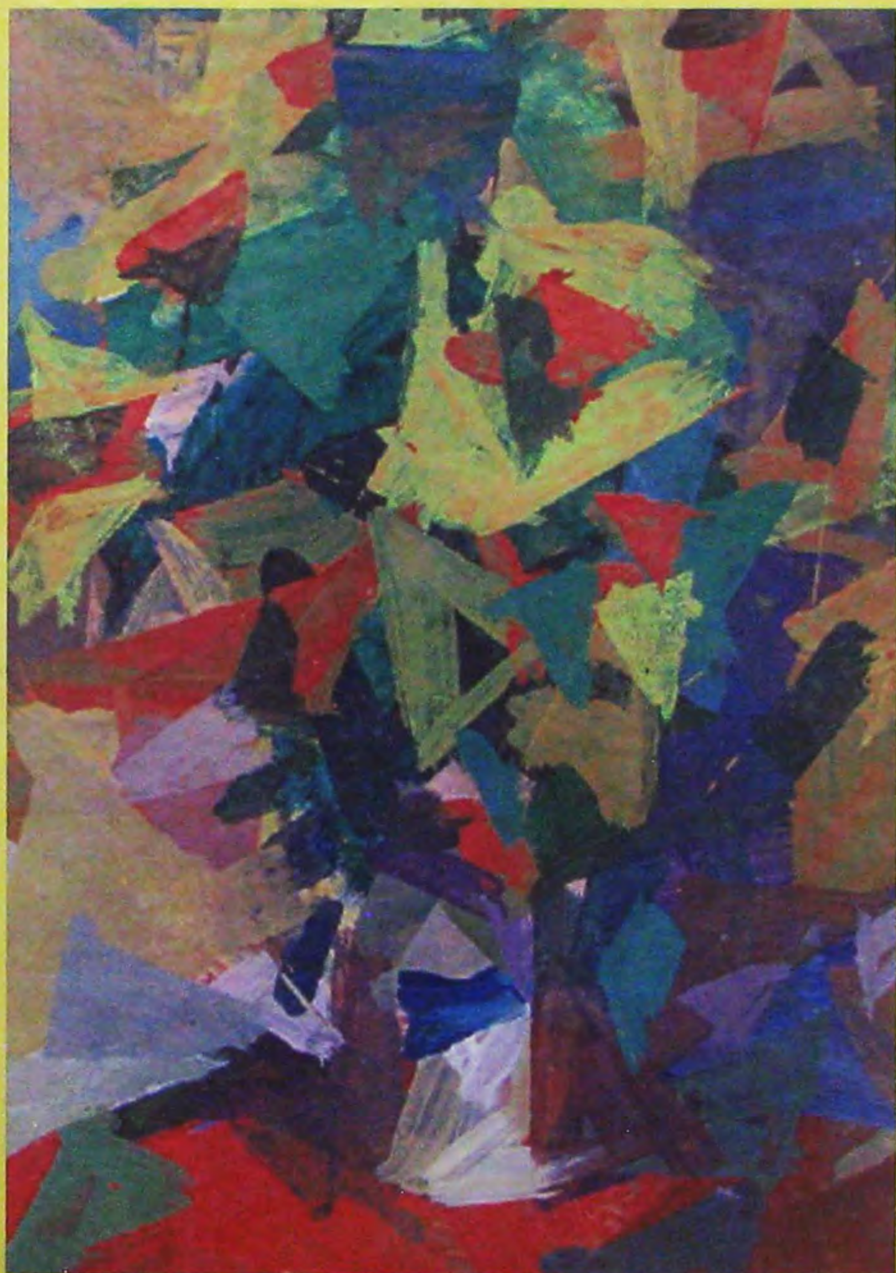
A Man for All Seasons

Selections from Souribandhu Kar



THE BOOK POINT

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Editors
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The Book Point nurtures talent among young children through mathematical quizzes and aptitude tests. It publishes books on mathematics, social sciences and humanities. The *Mathematics Calendar* published by The Book Point is essential reading for school children.

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PREFACE

Souribandhu Kar (b. 1948) is a well-known author, social activist and trade union leader. His life encompasses widely divergent spheres of interests and activities. He has published five volumes of short stories, biographies of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Maa Sarada Devi, Harekrushna Mahtab, B. R. Ambedkar and a large number of articles on literary, social and economic issues. He has participated actively in the struggle for securing the rights of the working class and ensuring for them a life of dignity. At present, he is the General Secretary, AITUC, Orissa.

This book seeks to reveal the many-sided personality of Souribandhu Kar through a generous selection of his writings. The stories, essays, letters, reviews, and speeches included in this volume yield a fascinating portrait of a man of letters and man of action. This volume is intended as a tribute to him on his sixtieth birthday.

In his writings, a passion for social justice is tempered with a deep compassion for human beings. His sensibility has been shaped by the political ideas of Marx and the social vision of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

In preparing this volume we have incurred many debts of gratitude. We would like to record here our warm appreciation for Priyambada Pal, Pramod K. Das, Snehaprava Das, and Jatindra K. Nayak for translating some of the writings included in this volume. We feel sincerely grateful to Asis Nanda and Sarat Tripathy for help in various ways. We feel a particular obligation to Supriya Kar, who helped us in putting together the volume and preparing the bibliography of Souribandhu Kar's writings.

Editors

SHORT STORY

Reminiscences

I

Talking about your personal experiences means you read out chapters from the book of your own life. However, it is no easy task, for one discovers one's real self only in the course of telling someone about it. There is always this fear of getting confused in the process of self-discovery. How many of us really understand ourselves, after all?

Gandhiji says in his autobiography, 'I never wanted to write an autobiography. My life is nothing but a series of experiments with truth. I simply wanted to tell this.'

Here I want to tell of persons who were an inseparable part of my life and how they had influenced me.

I am not a charismatic figure. My achievements are few. Perhaps before my death, I may attain a little fame. Or so do I hope. Some may bring petals of flowers to sprinkle over me or walk in my funeral procession when I would be lying lifeless. And one or two of my acquaintances may write my obituary.

But now is not the time to think of death. Death comes without a warning.

My childhood reading of the *Bhagabat* has influenced my understanding of death to a great extent. My mother, when I was a child, had brought a copy of the *Bhagabat* and handed it to me, 'God saves the meek. You have no father to look after you, to comfort you. So read the *Bhagabat*.'

My mother was the first teacher in my life. I had lost my father when I was three. I can't remember anything distinctly about him

now. But I never felt the absence of a father. My mother gave me everything I needed: authority and affection. Perhaps because of this my fondest memories always centre on her.

My maternal uncle's house was a little distance away from our village. It was just down the bridge that goes over river Brahmani. On the riverbank stands Gòkarneswar temple. A guest house has been built there. And the management of the temple is in the hands of the temple trust. The temple rises into view when you cross Jaraka square and go towards Brahmani bridge. A magazine, *Gokarnika* is being published from here.

My maternal grandfather worked as a priest there. Every day he would bring milk, wood apple leaves, and water from river Brahmani to offer to the deity. I was still a child. I would run after my maternal grandfather whenever I went to my maternal uncle's house. The temple is very famous. People from villages nearby come with their families to have a darshan of the lord even when the river is in spate.

The name of my maternal uncle's village is Odanga. I never knew or tried to find out why it was given such a peculiar name. Barabati is not far away from there. We would go there crossing fields. Now, only the national highway runs straight past the village from which dusty roads wind into villages.

It takes two hours to reach Odanga from our village through the fields. We would also pass through villages on our way. In our village that thatched house did not stand in a row. One comes across thatched houses arranged neatly in rows only in areas and around Puri.

When we passed through villages, we would come across fields, where different kinds of vegetables were grown. Odanga was famous for its potalas, ridge gourds, brinjals, bitter gourds, tomatoes, cucumbers, and chhachindras.

We would walk past sugarcane fields where sugarcane would be crushed with the help of bullocks. Someone would offer us a glass of sugarcane juice when we moved closer; sometimes he would

cut a piece of sugarcane and offer it to us. Now, even in towns sugar cane juice is sold in every lane. But the taste of sugar cane differs from the taste pf its juice. Sugarcane has a different and special taste.

When you go it was only natural to step on mud and cow dung! No one ever could walk so carefully as to escape these. And sometimes we would tread on thorn bushes. And we would also pass through muddy waterlogged paths.

My thread ceremony was held when I was aged eleven. I was then studying in class five. My mother was very worried about my thread ceremony; it was an extremely important event for her. I still remember that all the important persons of our village had come to attend this ceremony. An elderly person of our village, whom I called uncle, ceremonially gave me the thread he is still alive, and I continue to hold him in high respect. After the ceremony I went to visit my maternal uncle's house. As part of the ritual, the brahmachari had to have food at the maternal uncle's house before taking food anywhere else.

My maternal uncle was older than me by six or seven years. He was the apple of my maternal grand parents' eyes. My grandmother had passed away by then. I had never seen her. I don't remember any occasion when I had accompanied my mother to my maternal uncle's house. My mother was the eldest child of her parents. So my mamu, maternal uncle, always deferred to her.

My mother had told me to return in a day. I promised to do so and set off with my uncle. Fields laden with crops stretched for miles around. When we went through the field hedges we saw snakes, mongooses and other poisonous reptiles, which made us scared.

My head was shaven, I wore rings in my ears and I had a pigtail at the back of my head. I carried with me a jute bag in which I had put the clothes, towels etc that I had worn during the thread ceremony. When I reached my mamu's house his father was not at home. He had started a *Bhagabat* recital week at the Gokarneswar temple, which stood at the outskirt of the village. I took a dip in river Brahmani and

went to my grand father. When he saw me, he at once said, 'Let's see, if you can read the *Bhagabat*.'

I wore a towel and started reading the *Bhagabat*. From childhood I had practised reading loudly sitting on a mattress made of coconut and palm leaves. Tables and chairs were hard to find those days.

I started, saying 'Narayana Namastutam' and continued reading the *Bhagabat* for seven days. I told my grand father that mother would be angry with me for having stayed back, but he didn't listen to me.

That was when I got through the whole of the *Bhagabat* written by Jagannath Das. I read it through out my school career. It became a part of my life.

Beside the joy of reading the *Bhagabat*, there was the pleasure of having piping hot rice, dalma and saag. On some days, we had fried plantains and kheer. After making offerings to the Lord, we took the prasad with ghee. Even when we cook with extreme care, homemade food never tastes like the prasad prepared in temples. As an eleven year old boy, I could not understand the profound meaning of the *Bhagabat*. I only read mechanically. I had all the time to read those days. Now I have the ability to understand the *Bhagabat*, but no time to read it. River Brahmani continues to flow, but I don't know if *Bhagabat* weeks are celebrated in my uncle's village anymore. Life marches forward relentlessly.

My grandfather is no more. I very rarely go to my mamu's house now that the childhood fascination with it has faded. When I returned home after seven days, mother scolded her father more than she scolded me.

I then realized that mother's affection for her son was infinitely deeper than her affection for her father. Perhaps this holds true for all women.

Even the *Bhagabat* appears insignificant before a mother's love.

II

On river Brahmani, a fair-weather road used to be built from Gopalpur to Dharmasala bazaar every summer. It was called Jagannath sadak. Dharmasala is an old police station under the Jajpur subdivision.

Every year a fair called Munsi fair takes place here. Earlier, police officials were called munshis. The fair had been first started by the munshi in charge of the Dharmasala police station. Hence the name. On the riverbed a big haat is held. Taxes are collected from there and the money collected is spent on the fair. It is a large fair. As the munshis organise this fair, palanquins carrying images of deities are brought in large numbers. Makeshift shops with out number are opened there.

Once I had gone to see the fair with my mamu. I went there again, after I got a little older and when I was a college student.

People would crowd around the palanquin of Lord Gopinath. Kirtanias holding a silver staff in hand would be dancing. People gathered at the fair would be enthralled by their ecstatic dance. Jagannath sadak lay a long distance away from the bridge. By the side of that road, the deities remained till midday.

Who would reach the fair ground first— this though lay uppermost in the minds of people who came to see the fair. In the month of Phaguna, the warm morning sunlight caressed one's chilled body, and eyes were heavy with sleep. Still, the visitors stared wide-eyed at the images. No one had reason to be afraid of the police.

I had walked all the way to the fair with my mamu. My maternal grandfather had given me one rupee to spend. Laddus were kept stacked in sweet stalls. Womenfolk bought all kinds of trinkets. By the time the fair came to an end, the sweet stalls sold huge quantities of sweets.

Munshi fair seemed to me a very colourful carnival. The white camphor garlands of the kirtanias changed colour and their white clothes turned many-coloured while the horias lost themselves in throwing coloured powders.

People came back from Gokarneswar temple, chewing wood apple leaves. Their heavy lidded eyes would be half-closed but they looked as if they had won a victory over an unconquerable enemy.

Time has gone by; but nothing has dimmed my childhood fascination for Gokarneswar temple, Munsi melana and river Brahmani.

Now no one needs to take the fair-weather Jagannath sadak, for a huge concrete bridge gives access to the temple. Womenfolk come riding rickshaws and cars. Bullock carts are used but rarely. But the deities still come riding palanquins.

Why do people come here in such large numbers? Because of love they feel for gods or for love for fellow human beings or for material gain? Someone feels ecstatic at a glimpse of the deity and rolls on the dust. A group of people drink the tale of love of Radha and Krishna, which was sung by the kirtanias. Lovers give sidelong glances to their loved ones. I wonder if that warms the fair ground. Now, whenever I cross the Gokarneswar bridge by car, I automatically fold my hands in deference to Lord Gokarneswar.

Everything now seems like a dream: my going to Gokarneswar temple, chewing wood apple leaves, taking a dip in river Brahmani.

When I scolded my son who had spent the whole night at the fair and returned in the noon the next day, I realised that I had crossed the age of going to the fair. Now I was only holding on to the memories.

III

Mother called out, 'Arakshita, ajaa iş ready, go with him to the haat and bring a pen' I was around eleven years old and was reading in the fifth class. Our school was within a calling distance from our house. The school's headmaster was the village schoolmaster's son. My name was enrolled in that school. The date, which was considered to be auspicious for me, was registered as my date of my birth. It was different from my actual date of birth. My age was decreased by two years.

I always came first in the examinations. Sometimes I stood second for having secured less marks in mathematics. I would write dipping an ink pen in an inkbottle. My mother would say, 'If you practice handwriting, your handwriting would be good.' I would draw the lines with a pencil and practise two pages of handwriting every day. Fountain pens were available then, but it was difficult to get these in a village and they were also costly.

I was selected to sit for the scholarship examination. By this time, another new headmaster had joined. He came from a village near my maternal uncle's. He was my mother's classmate at Madhupur minor school. He was a very strict person. He would lay sticks of different sizes on his table. Like a butcher dragging a goat to the block, he would take a pupil behind the door and thrash him. The poor boy would scream, 'Mother, mother...' We were all very scared of him.

'Where is your fountain pen? How will you go to sit for the scholarship examination?' how the scholarship examination and a fountain pen are connected? Though I could never grasp the connection, he was able to persuade mother that a fountain pen was what I needed urgently. Mother called out to me. I was working out sums lying under the shade of a tree in the mango orchard.

'Go with ajaa. And bring a fountain pen from Madhuban haat.' My heart overflowed with joy when I heard mother say this. But we had to go to Madhuban haat. It was nearly four miles from village. Kuakhia bazaar had not been set up at the time. Madhuban haat was very famous in villages nearby. Mahia ajaa used to go to the haat twice a week. He managed to earn a little from his visits. He was an expert in repairing watches and locks. Mother gave me a five-rupee note and asked me to it to ajaa, 'Mamu, buy him a fountain pen. He is merely a child and easily can be cheated.'

Mahia ajaa nodded, 'Let's go. It is already 11 o' clock. It would take nearly an hour to cover four miles.' I accompanied ajaa, bare of foot.

We crossed river Kharasuan and passed though Bhotaka village and Panchagochhia. We walked though crop fields. During hot noons, people also picked vegetables like brinjals, potalas, phuti kakudi, and jahni to take them to the haat for sale.

Ajaa wore shoes made of discarded tyres. When I walked on the hot river sand, I would sigh. He would say, 'You know Souri, here you get very sweet melons.' When we passed though our fields, our eyes fell on a large watermelon. The field was then cultivated by a tenant farmer. We carved to eat a melon. From not so far, Mahanta, our farmhand, called out, 'Ho, son of Kar family, where are you going with ajaa? Come, won't you have a melon?'

Mahanta was also my classmate at school. His father's name was Chakradhar Pradhan, but he was known as Chakara. He belonged to radhi caste. Preparing rice flakes was their traditional family occupation. By then Mahia ajaa had picked up a melon that lay concealed in sand. Then he wiped off the melon and broke it open by dashing it on the ridge. 'Have a piece.' We resumed our walk eating the melon. The Kharasuan was shallow at the patia ghat, but water was crystal clear. We took water in our cupped hands and drank to out heart's content. We could hear the bustle of the haat from a distance. The wind carried voices to us. Mango trees stood on both the sides of the road. Shadows of the trees fell across the ground. Ajaa was used to walking on this road, but my feet burnt. I hurried and took shelter under the shade of a mango tree.

It was a huge gathering. Someone carried a basket of vegetables on his head. People chatted about who had a good harvest of potalas, who needed money for his daughter's marriage, who was buying a plot of land. They talked about how sugarcane fields got ruined, how this time during the fair, the kirtanias created a nuisance before Brundaban Chandra's palanquin and so on. I tried keeping pace with ajaa. Everybody knew him. One would ask, 'Son of the Pani family, have you repaired my lock?' Ajaa would nod. To every enquiry he would respond by nodding.

We entered the haat. It was full of small platforms having palm fronds for roofs. Banyan trees, peepul trees, mango trees shaded these. There were only a couple of big shops. Mahia ajaa took me near the pen shop and asked me to wait there.

Everything seemed new to me. Many people from our village had come to sell vegetables. I looked at the pens arranged neatly in the shelf having a glass door. An hour passed, but there was no sign of ajaa. The shopkeeper, seeing a child like me, subjected me to a sort of interrogation. My legs started aching from standing for so long. I was too afraid to roam in the haat by myself. Mother had warned me, 'Never leave ajaa's side. Do as he says.' I felt like crying while I was waiting for him. I thought to myself, 'I am a big boy reading in class five. I am going to sit for the scholarship examination, would I be lost in the crowd. I grew confident when I ran into Sudam Naik from our village. He pointed ajaa to me: 'He sits there.'

Mahia Ajaa was busy repairing a lock. I went and sat near him on the thick root of a banyan tree. The haat was coming to a close. The sun poured down scarlet rays on the trees. We had to again cover four miles on foot. At last, ajaa said, 'Come, we will buy a pen.' We went over to the shop where he had left me before the shopkeeper placed before me many poems.

Ajaa picked up one and examined it. 'Parker' was written on it.

'How much does it cost?' Ajaa asked.

The shopkeeper said, 'Four rupees and fourteen annas.' Ajaa handed him the five-rupee note. The shopkeeper gave back two brass coins. He poured ink into the pen, and scrawled something on a paper to check if it worked properly. I put the pen in my shirt pocket. We made our way back taking another route. Mahia ajaa boasted that he has used a parker fountain pen in his childhood and he predicted that I would definitely come out successful in the scholarship examination.

When I reached home, mother was lighting a clay lamp near the tulsi platform. She asked, 'Bought a pen? Show it to me, is it good?' she then looked at my pocket and exclaimed, 'How come there is a black spot on your shirt pocket?'

I discovered that the fountain pen was leaking and a blotch of ink had appeared on my shirt. Mother was furious seeing the black spot on my only shirt and at my stupidity. I was feeling hungry but only got two heavy blows from mother and fell on the ground. The parker pen, lying on the ground, was mocking at me. It was quite late when mother tapped on my shoulder and said, 'Come and eat. Go to Madhuban tomorrow and change the pen.'

The moment I woke up next morning, I remembered mother's words. I could not tell her that it was Ajaa who persuaded me to buy this pen. I mustered courage and set off again for Madhuban haat. But the shopkeeper did not recognise me. I returned home walking in the scorching heat, but my mother's anger scared me more than the heat. My face was pale and sad. Tears rolled down my cheeks, which mother wiped with the help of her sari end and said, 'Sit and have your food. You look like a piece of burnt wood. You Arakshit, poor child.' I could not say a word and burst into tears.

I went and sat for my examination with using that pen. My hands were smeared with ink. My friends commented, 'You would surely get scholarship. It is a good sign if the hands get blackened. The blotch of ink on my shirt had faded by then. When the results came out, our teacher said, 'Your name does not figure in the list.' Mother said nothing. That day, nothing was cooked at home and everybody went without food. After this, mother did not want me to continue my studies at the village school. I carried a jute bag on my shoulder, my clothes and other necessities in it and set off for my piusi's house at Mangalpur on foot. When I reached her house, I found that my pen had fallen somewhere through a hole in my bag. I took admission in Jajpur high school and forget all about it.

Today I stand in the Madhuban High School premises as the chief speaker in its annual function. I have put a parker pen in my folder and look impressive. Many eminent persons are sitting in front of me and listening to what I said.

Many things have changed in between. The same banyan tree spreads its branches and occupies a huge space.

Everything came back to me in a flash. I was standing with Mahia ajaa to buy a parker pen. He was busy repairing a lock. I could hear my mother saying tenderly, 'You, poor child.'

IV

That a village boy like me would one day finish his studies at the village school and go to one in a town was beyond anyone's imagination. My mother was against my studying in the village school. As for me, I was thrilled that I would go to Jajpur to study. But my excitement was also laced with apprehension.

I crossed the Kharasuan and to reach my piusi's house, we had to walk a few miles. We had no money to pay the bus fare. My grandfather said, 'It is not far away, we can easily go on foot.' We passed through fields. It took us nearly two hours to complete our journey. When we reached my piusi's house it was already dark.

My piusi was a widow. She was childless. But she was very short-tempered and she had a domineering attitude.

Jajpur was three miles from where she lived. I had no other option but to walk all the way to my school. I went and enrolled myself in Jajpur high school. It was a big school, and was quite famous. Sri Achyutananda Mishra was the head master and Mr. Narayan Chandra Ghosh was the assistant headmaster.

But Sri Raj Kishore Das, our head clerk, had more power than these two put together. He entered my name in the register. I could sense that he felt sympathy for a fatherless child like me.

Our school faced the office of the sub-collector. At the back of the school there was a playground and an isolated room where lived our Urdu teacher.

Historically, Jajpur is an important place in ancient times; it is used to be the capital of Orissa. It is not far off from river Baitaranee. And the narrow lanes are lined with small shops on either side.

I was a student of the sixth class. Our class teacher, Shri Bhubanananda Mishra, who taught us English, was very strict. He would do sketches to explain things. My task was to bring the picture board every day to the classroom. I was made the monitor of the class. Without my knowledge, I started taking responsibilities.

Now, forty years later, I am going over these memories and returning to those days at Jajpur high school when I never knew what life held in store for me. I was then floating down the stream of life, and I tried not to get drowned.

I had to try hard to arrange so that I could pay the school fees. My mother had no money. My piusi would vent all her anger on me, by telling me off frequently. Yes, she would become restless if got late. She would call out my name loudly. On Sundays, I had to work in her garden and help with planting vegetable seeds, weeding out grass and watering garden. But I always relished the taste of toasted brinjal eaten with watered rice.

I would throw the bag on my shoulder and start for school around nine o' clock. I had no shoes. My legs would turn red as I walked down the dusty road. In the month of Ashadh the rains turned the road muddy and slippery. Many students like me took this road to go to school. I belonged to a village different from theirs. So, sometimes they teased me. They would throw muddied water at me. One would pull at my hair. I would turn around and see faces mocking at me and hear the sound of laughter. My eyes would fill. I would remember my mother's words, 'God helps the meek.'

Every morning, I would take a dip in the canal and go to Lord Shiva's temple and chew wood apple leaves offered to him.

These were the six years of my early adolescence. Memories of Jajpur High School, time spent with teachers inside the classrooms come crowding into my mind.

I remember how Jagabandhu babu taught us to draw with the help of lines and circles. He taught us English in class ten. He would get carried away while teaching us Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He

was fat, fair and bald in the front. He would fill a rickshaw when rode on it.

Many such stories of my childhood lie buried in my mind. I never understood the importance of writing down my thoughts. I could not do that then, have never been able to do that. It is said, 'What you cannot develop during your childhood, you can never do later in life.' The bad habits persist. The loneliness of the student life is still there and I am still without a friend or a companion. I go on paddling my own canoe.

The road was a slippery one. I too slipped and fell sometimes as I trod it. Youth casts its spell on all. I would immerse myself in the books, which told of Robin, the pirate and his heroine, Meera and I would also tread booklets meant for village women. They made me feel restless.

Sometimes I gave my piusi the slip and spend hours on end swimming in the river. I went to play football in the funeral ground, sewed the ball with the help of my sacred thread. I started reading detective novels ignoring textbooks, playing cards with village girls and women. These were like water leaking into my lifeboat.

While doing all this, I was unwittingly hurting myself. Results of the matriculation examinations came as a blow to me and hit me hard. I was placed not in the first or second class; nor even in the third class. No one could ever imagine that a student like me, who was the teachers' pet, would fail his examination.

I could not share my feelings with anyone. Besides, my younger brother had joined me at the school and I also had to shoulder his responsibility.

But then may be I was not totally spoilt. Amidst all these I kept reading the *Bhagabat* and that aroused my consciousness. It made me a traveller on a new road. There remained always the fear of getting lost, but I was fortunate that I reached my destination in the end.

I have lost touch with the friends who were reading with me at school. Now and then I accidentally met a few of them, like the clouds floating in the sky.

Sometimes when I go to Jajpur, I meet my teacher Bhubanananda babu. My eyes would pass from him to the school with the wide gate. I would remember how Saraswati puja was celebrated in our school premises. All night we would collect flowers from others' gardens and also stole cabbages and vegetables for the feast to be held the next day. We would not notice how time passed while preparing for the puja.

From class sixth to class eleventh, for six long years, I was taught by four teachers. I had wanted to hold the fingers of one of these and walk down the path of life. I longed for guidance and love from my teachers.

It was the first time I went from a remote village to a town, small by the standards of present days. I learnt many things these, sometimes cheated myself and got lost somewhere in the crowd.

I went on to become a college student. The days I spent at the high school formed a part of the past.

Sometimes I remember how poignant it was to be a part of a large place, even though I was but a very small part of it.

Translated from the Oriya by Supriya Kar

(*Stories*, Rupantar: Bhubaneswar, 2006)

That Moment

Sanjay had not forgotten the experience of elation when his book was published. It was a heady feeling. He felt as if he had drunk a large bottle of wine and was intoxicated. The world around him looked colourful and seemed to shrinking. People, who gathered about him, looked admiringly at him, especially the girls who were in love with him. Sanjay began to hum under his breath, though he had never been a singer. Life was a marvel! The earth had begun to look beautiful to him from that very moment. The mounds of praise and admiration around him had grown into become mountains. He felt that he had acquired the strength to lift the mountains all by himself. He felt that there was no one more prosperous and powerful than him.

He was a young man filled with a fresh excitement. He felt as if he had touched the sky at the experience of the first great success in his life. He began to dance as he walked on the road, clutching the book, his eyes closed. Someone gave him a hard shove. Perhaps he would have fallen head. Rivulets of blood streaming from his broken nose might have soaked the shirt he wore. But luckily he didn't. He opened his eyes and looked. It was his childhood friend, Kalindi

Kalindi worked in the iron factory at Mancheswar. His hard, muscle-bound body had that typical sheen of polished granite. Anyone who saw him would like to call him 'Blackie.' He was popularly known as Blackie at the Iron factory. His real name was Kalindi. The iron particles from the factory seemed to have settled on his body making it look even blacker. What he needed, Sanjay thought, was a thorough scrubbing with a cake of soap and a good bath under

a shower. His conduct and gestures appeared as uncivilized as his looks. The way he spouted out words while speaking could have been mistaken for the sound of the sledgehammer hitting hot iron plates. He said out whatever he felt, hiding nothing, in a rude, grating voice. Whenever Sanjay met him Kalindi talked like that.

He called out Sanjay's name loudly, and the unexpectedness of his sudden appearance on the scene, and his loud call gave Sanjay a jolt. Taking Sanjay's hand in his own with force he pressed it hard and shook him, 'Hey buddy, how are you? Where are you going?' He asked. Before Sanjay could say anything he added, 'I read the book you have written. But I didn't like it. You don't seem to know anything on that particular subject.'

Sanjay stood staring at him, speechless. It felt as if Kalindi had thrown a handful of mud at him and his face had been smeared with that. He felt disgusted. He was relishing the honour and appreciation he had received and his spirits had soared into the sky. Kalindi's remarks pulled him back to the earth. It seemed to him as if he was surrounded by enemies, who were ready to attack him and kill. He pushed Kalindi's hand aside, gave him a sour look and turned to leave. But Kalindi grabbed his wrist and squeezed it so hard that Sanjay winced. His anger turned in to pain. Intending to escape of Kalindi's hard grip, he asked, 'What do you think of the book? Why don't you like it?'

Kalindi noticed the anger in his friend's eyes. His grip on Sanjay's wrist slackened. He felt guilty and his tone softened. 'No, no I didn't mean anything serious. It was just a casual remark. Somehow the book didn't appeal to me. How can I explain exactly this to you?'

'Forget it. I know how good a reader you are.' Sanjay said sarcastically.

'I don't know whether I am a good reader. But when I read the news of the release of your book in the *Sambad*, I immediately went

to a bookshop and bought a copy. Since so many intellectuals had attended the release ceremony, I was curious about the book and read it from the beginning to the end keeping awake all night.'

'Hmm, a little while ago he told me the book was no good.' Then why did he read it through staying awake all night? Would my publisher have selected it for publication had the book not been good? Would established critics have paid it such attention if it weren't? Sanjay thought to himself.

'Tell me why the book didn't appeal to you.' Sanjay said. He sounded eager.

'Do you really want to hear my views? Are you sure you won't mind? The book is definitely well written. The language has power, and the narrative technique is wonderful. But the people you have written about, the factory-workers seem unreal. You know nothing about them at all.'

Sanjay stared him wide-eyed. He could not say anything.

'I have observed them, studied their life; my writing is based on observation.'

'But you have written nothing about their nature and their habits, or their peculiarities. They are really a strange kind of people. You do not know them at all.'

'Do *you* know them?' Sanjay asked.

'Of course, quite well.'

'Then you should write about them.' Sanjay said, now thoroughly vexed with the entire discussion.

'Not a bad idea. At least I can write on them better than you.' Kalindi said, a smile playing on his lips. The smile looked like stars glittering in a pitch-black night. The smile helped to alleviate Sanjay's anger. He quietly walked on. Kalindi walked abreast of him, his hand on Sanjay's shoulder. They reached a roadside teashop. Kalindi

ordered two cups of tea in a loud voice and slumped on the large, long stone lying nearby. Sanjay too sat down. He sat silently, thinking.

'The factory-workers, the coal-hewers are men having a peculiar temperament. Their nature is different; sometimes eccentric. They are interesting characters.'

What was Kalindi is talking about? Sanjay looked more intently at the black face of his friend. Layers of iron-dust that had settled over his face made it look even blacker. But there was no trace of pretension in that face. He rather saw there the picture of a man, who toiled all day long in the iron-factory. The face reflected the suffering, the strength, and the character of a factory-worker.

'Well, what do you want me to do?' Sanjay looked questioningly at Kalindi's face.

'I don't know. You may rewrite it. Give it a go—we'll help you."

"No, I don't need your or anybody's help. I shall go to the factory myself and observe these strange men,' Sanjay retorted, feeling Kalindi's offer of help had injured his ego.

'Wonderful! You will go and observe them! It will be a waste of time.' Kalindi said mockingly. 'You have to live with them, become one of them.'

Sanjay looked at his friend, puzzled. 'What did you say? I have to become a factory worker? All right, but how?'

'You can do that. We'll help you to learn. Join my team. After a month or two you will automatically learn everything." And Sanjay agreed to work under Kalindi.

'I seem to have been quite fortunate to have a respectable person like you working under me. A few days here will enable you to make direct contact with the workers and you shall gain firsthand knowledge of their life. And the book you will write based on this practical experience, will undoubtedly achieve fame.' Kalindi said with a smile.

Sanjay wondered if he would be able to grasp the practical details of a factory worker's life by working as one? How would they react if they came to know that he was a writer? He shared this feeling of apprehension with his friend.

'First you join us. Then we'll see what happens later. I'll handle everything. You need not worry at all.' Kalindi assured Sanjay and rose to his feet.

After a few days Sanjay reached the factory at Mancheswar, where Kalindi worked. Though nothing about his looks make him look like a writer, he seemed the odd man out among the factory workers. But Kalindi had drawn up a full-proof plan. He said in a loud voice, 'Brothers, this fellow has come from my village. Take him with you and give him some work. You have to teach him everything. He was working in a shop earlier and does not have any idea about a factory worker's job.' Some of the workers gathered there and watched him with curiosity. 'Kali Bhai, what is his name? He does not look at all fit for this kind of work. His body is soft.' One of them remarked as he felt Sanjay's body with his black, callused hand. 'He is Haria.' Kalindi said promptly. 'Had Kalindi thought of the name before?' Sanjay wondered. He lost no time in uttering it.

One after another the workers walked by Sanjay's side. Kalindi instructed them to take Sanjay along with them, and left.

Sanjay looked after him uncertainly and thought what he should do after this. Should he join the group of workers or return home? No, he can't afford to do so. That would spoil his plan. He had to stay here for a few days and study these people. Having made up his mind, Sanjay walked along with the group, hiding his original writer's self under that of Haria, the factory worker and reached the place where the workers were hitting huge bars of hot iron with large hammers.

The workers, in large, knee-high boots and helmets, struck at the hot iron with huge hammers that must have weighed at least ten

kilogram. Chunks of hot iron flew at their feet at every stroke. The outfit of the workers and their bulging muscles frightened Sanjay. As he stood looking at the iron bars someone placed a cap on his head and tossed a pair of those large boots at him and asked him to put them on. He shoved a large, heavy hammer into Sanjay's hand. Sanjay watched the workers striking the hot iron bars; they talked in a loud voice as they worked, laughed and cut jokes. Sanjay tried to imitate their action. But his body trembled and his limbs stiffened; he did not have any idea where the blow of his hammer fell on the hot iron pieces. No one seemed to be taking any notice of him. The sound of various machines had filled the air with deafening noise. At last, the siren blew marking the end of the shift. Sanjay came out of the gate of the factory along with others. Their bodies were covered with iron dust. He felt stabs of hunger in his stomach. They reached the nearby mess, where they lived. It had slopping tiled roof. The house lay buried in darkness. Akbar entered through the narrow door and lighted the lantern. One after the other, the workers went to the common water-tap and washed themselves clean. They sat down and ate from aluminum plates coarse rice, watery *dal*, a small ball of mashed potato and salt. They ate the tasteless food with great relish. Then they unrolled the beds that had been put against the wall, stretched their on the floor and sprawled out their exhausted bodies on them.

Sanjay whispered into Kalindi's ear: 'Will they throw me out of their team? The hammer was too heavy to lift. I could not do much work.'

'Go to sleep.' Kalindi said in a low voice. 'Try to learn the art of survival.'

But the workers didn't look at Sanjay and began discussing the work at the factory from a philosophical point of view. 'Is it possible that the work a man does can change his nature and habit? Can a layman handle the job at an iron factory? Besides, someone who

comes to work in a factory like this must be honest and disciplined. Will it not affect our sincerity and honesty if men of loose morals join our group?' Jadua remarked. Sanjay lay quietly on the mat and listened to their discussion and the language they used. He wanted to join their discussion. He felt an urge to give them a brief lecture on honesty, but he suppressed it because none of them spoke about him.

'Do you want people to listen to advice before being given work to do?' asked Kalindi. 'No one can be a real human being unless he works hard. Hard work can transform the brute inside a man and make him human.' The debate went on. Sanjay had been hitting the iron with the heavy hammer all day long, something he had never done before. His body was sore and his limbs ached. The arguments and counter-arguments did not enter his head. He lay quiet, stretching his tired body on the bed; his eyes were heavy with sleep. The discussion gradually turned towards Sanjay.

'You must trust people. And you must know that one has to earn the trust of others through one's thought and action. You can't pin your trust on just one person and draw a conclusion.' Kalindi declared.

'Yes, a human being might be trusted. Could any one trust a hunk of flesh who calls himself a human being but is incapable of doing any hard work?' Someone protested from the darkness.

'Hunk-of-flesh? Am I just a hunk of flesh in these workers' eyes?' Sanjay thought angrily to himself. But no one addressed him using that name. Kalindi said that someone should light the lantern and put it on the shelf. No one wanted to leave his bed.

'All right, Shyamal will come a little later. We should wait for him.'

The moment Shyamal was mentioned, they jumped out of their beds and, after lighting the lantern, put it on a shelf. 'Shyamal must have been older in age than Kalindi, and these fellows have respect for him', Sanjay thought.

Shyamal came after a little while. Kalindi and others gathered around him as soon as he entered. Shyamal was a young man of slender build. Perhaps he was the youngest among them, Sanjay thought. But everybody seemed to be very fond of him. 'Only one paper is left. Already four papers are over. This is a tough one. If I manage to do well in this last paper, I'll get a good division in the examination and get admission in the University.' Shyamal was heard saying in a loud voice.

Shyamal's father had died in an accident in the factory. A large piece of hot iron flying out of the blast furnace as he worked at it had hit him. Shyamal's mother had succumbed to some ailment a few months ago. Shyamal was left alone in this world. The love and care of the factory-workers sustained him. They had become his guardian. Shyamal's father was the headman of the team to which Kalindi belonged. Shyamal was appointed to his father's post, but he did not discontinue his studies.

The lantern kept burning all night. Everybody, one after another had fallen asleep. They woke up before the first rays of the sun fell on the earth. After going through with their routine chores and taking bath, the workers burnt incense-sticks below the pictures of different gods and goddesses that hung on the wall and offered them worship. Akbar performed the *Namaaz* sitting on a mat in one corner of the room. Sanjay took in everything at a glance. He could recollect last night's discussion clearly. There was now a soft spot in his heart for Shyamal.

For days Sanjay closely observed the nature and behaviour of the factory workers. Their love, affection and concern for each other, and their camaraderie amazed Sanjay. Shyamal's examination was over. The results came out in due course. He had secured the highest marks in all subjects. His friends had encouraged him to go for higher studies. The factory-workers organized a feast to celebrate Shyamal's success. The loud rejoicing seemed to shake the small room.

Shyamal, for them, was not just the son of a comrade. He was the symbol of their hopes; they saw in him the fulfilment of their many unfulfilled aspirations. But Shyamal felt as if he was shrinking within when they encouraged him to pursue higher studies.

He had been appointed a fitter in the factory. Recently he was promoted to the post of the head-fitter. He was reluctant to go away to some other place leaving these loving people for doing a higher course. A sense of insecurity oppressed him. But he did not have the heart to hurt their sentiment. He stood there quietly, holding his head down. The workers could read Shyamal's thoughts and tried to understand him. They realized that those who worked at the iron factory couldn't afford to be sentimental. Perhaps Shyamal was right, they felt. Tears of joy rolled down their cheeks

Sanjay watched them and thought about the novel he wanted to write. It would be difficult to portray the true picture of these unusual people. In what language would he describe the love and emotion that remained hidden behind their crude visages? He had developed a mixed feeling for Shyamal, that of admiration and envy. He was doubtful if he himself could ever be able to win such love.

A few days at the factory opened Sanjay's eyes to realty. He watched factory life from close quarters; the blast furnace, the molten iron inside it, the huge hammers, the iron particles, the loud clang of the hammer hitting the iron strips, the noise of men and machines, and gruesome death. In his mind's eye, he saw the rolled-up beds placed against the wall in that cramped room with a sloping tiled roof, the queue at the municipality water-tap, the coarse rice and the mashed potato. He grew accustomed to the routine of the workers; the offering of worship to the deity before sunrise and the humming of mantras in the philosophical analysis of life in the dim light of the lantern at night. He was beginning to learn the work, tried to be one with them, one among them. He was gaining new experiences of life and learning to discover himself as a factory worker.

Suddenly it occurred to him that a day might come when he like Shyamal would be reluctant to go away from Kalindi and other factory workers. He might feel that there would be no place for him in this world other than the iron factory.

The bell of the factory began to clang. The workers swarmed out of the narrow tile-roofed houses and walked towards the factory. Sanjay strode along with them, carrying the large hammer over his shoulder in one hand and holding the long-handled shovel in the other. He had been able to learn a little, and understand a little. He had understood himself and the workers to some extent, and tried to live like one of them. But he did not have the words to express what he understood and what he thought.

Probably the book he had written had failed to capture this experience. This was what Kalindi had pointed out to him on that day when he had run into him.

Sanjay longed to raise himself above trivial complexes, of the petty needs, his ego and a sense of deprivation. He tried to find a way out of the morass of ambitions that seemed to have buried his self, to climb up the solid ground and be one with those real human beings who lived there. He now walked briskly, keeping pace with them, towards the iron factory.

Translated from the Oriya by Snehaprava Das

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TRAVEL WRITING

My First Day in Moscow

Moscow – the city of my dreams. When the plane landed in Moscow, I found my friend, Arun waiting to receive me.

A friend in a foreign country is like an oasis in the middle of a desert.

The Moscow airport was in no way different from Howrah station, where taxi-drivers surround you like vultures pecking at a carcass the moment you disembark from the train.

Travelling one hour here costs us eighty dollars, which was equivalent to two thousand nine hundred seventy-six rupees in India – almost a month's earning of a low-paid worker.

We boarded the bus. The lady bus conductor charged me four thousand roubles extra for the huge bag I was carrying even after my friend, Arun had punched the tickets.

No one in the bus carried a bag as heavy as mine. People, young and old, were engrossed in reading books or newspapers while travelling in buses and trains like students silently concentrating on their textbooks inside a classroom.

After entering the city the bus reached the metro station. After punching our tokens, when we gingerly stepped on the escalator, which was going rapidly upwards, we felt as if here life, too, moved rapidly like an escalator.

Travelling in a metro is a pleasant experience. You don't want to slump into a sofa out of fatigue even after journeying in it for about an hour, standing. Though the six-seater couchettes can

accommodate more passengers in them, one does not see people doing so here. While loses one's identity in the crowd, the bustle and din in a Calcutta metro, one becomes conscious of their shelves while journeying in the metro in Moscow. The distinctions between the small and the big, rich and the poor cannot be recognized here – they all seem identical. They all appear active and full of life. Caste, creed and religion here seem to hold no meaning. After our journey in a bus, then a metro, again in another metro followed by a journey by a bus, we came to a fourteen-storied building, where Arun lived. His apartment lay on the ninth floor. But Arun and Namita, his wife, are proud of being Oriyas. Every object adorning their house reflects their love for Orissa and its culture.

My expectation that the weather in Moscow would be sunny proved unfounded. A chilly wind kept blowing into the room through the window. Even having a cup of hot coffee was no help in this inclement weather. The thought that my first day in Moscow will be wasted was off course painful.

Around 5 o'clock we got ready and set out to see the famous Kremlin Wall and the Red Square.

One finds much information on what this palace went through in history books. This huge palace and its walls resemble the Red Fort in India. Opposite the palace lies the Red Square.

This road, which had been washed by the blood of countless patriots during the Russian Revolution, inspired awe, and I felt like paying respects to it while walking on it. The stars and eagles engraved on the domes here indicate the changes that transformed the Russian polity.

The statues of great patriots staring at the Red Square behind the Lenin Mausoleum seemed to be wondering whether their sacrifice was worthwhile.

My friend, Arun said that the Red Square had gone through a sea change after Communist rule ended in Russia. One does not get

to see Red Guards parading on special occasions any more. The president remains absent from his official residence in the Kremlin Palace most of the time. Hence, the palace gate is almost always found to be closed.

There is a small church facing the Red Square, which is an example of a very rich architectural tradition— the Saint Basle Church. Though many churches were demolished (of course, not this one) during Stalin's rule, now efforts are being made to restore these monuments to their past glory. Who can explain why events in history take such strange courses?

We went around the Kremlin Wall. Newly married couples offered flowers to the martyrs at an altar built behind the wall. It seemed as if the elders stretching out their hands blessed them with happiness when they stepped down, their hands intertwined.

While we were lost in observing this beautiful sight we saw a shrivelled, old woman sitting helplessly holding onto the altar of the martyrs with a look of helplessness in her eyes. One altar in every city in the Russian Republic is dedicated to millions of unknown martyrs. Under the altar are seen those whom their sons and fathers have left to lead a lonely and helpless life. All they could hope to survive on was memories.

While we were walking around the Red Square and the Kremlin Wall our thoughts went back to October Revolution of 1917 against the rule of Tsars and we discussed the role this revolution played in bringing about a change in the entire world as we munched hundred grams of peanuts which we had bought paying 3,000 roubles. The beauty of the tall green trees that surrounded the Kremlin Walls fascinated passers-by.

While walking on the banks of river Moscow, I came across a recently built huge statue of Peter the Great standing on a ship. The people of Russian Republic have not forgotten the bravery and gallantry of Peter the Great. They have built this statue near the mast of a ship in order to pay tribute to the great deeds of Peter the Great.

Peter the Great had built the Petersburg in 1703 and the administration centre of the country was shifted to Petersburg. Petersburg was not originally a part of the Soviet Union. Peter the Great had won it from Sweden in a battle and had named the city after him. This is perhaps the reason why the people of Russia have not forgotten him yet. Peter the Great succeeded in getting his name written in letters of gold in the annals of history for bringing glory to his country by winning many wars, bringing about social reforms, modernizing the education system, and introducing many welfare measures.

The vastness of the city of Moscow overwhelms one. One cannot make it out even after tiring oneself walking great distances. After visiting the city, which was celebrating its 850th birthday (1147-1997), Namita and I returned home.

The roads in Moscow are very wide. Here one comes across many crossroads and huge buildings. Each building accommodates up to 300 to 400 families.

We disembarked from the bus after one hour's journey. We went a shop nearby to buy a few watermelons. A watermelon weighing one kilogram cost 2,000 roubles. We bought five kilos paying ten thousand roubles. This would have cost seventy-one rupees in India.

Soon sleep overpowered us. In the morning, I found the rays of the sun coming in through the glass window and lying scattered in the room. But if one wanted to see how Moscow looked from the ninth storey, he had to be disappointed for fourteen or fifteen-storied sky-scrappers surrounded him.

Do buildings there soar so high to accommodate the tall men and women in Russia?

II

Fish Fries and Oriya Families in Moscow

The speed at which the word of mouth travels is incredible. The news of my being in Moscow had spread among the few Oriyas

residing there the moment I left Orissa. Who does not relish being popular? How many people really make it to a foreign country?

Arun's wife had prepared herself mentally to show me what a deft homemaker she was. She had invited others to have dishes made of fish and crabs at their place.

Rohi and Bhakura fish cost one hundred twenty rupees per kilo. Prasant, his wife, Leena, their sons Siddhant, Suresh and Swaraj reached Arun's house at about 2 o'clock. Suresh and Prasant were very young— around thirty years of age. They were students of computer engineering at Moscow. They had settled here engaged in business and were doing well.

Both Prasant and Suresh had love marriages. Prasant had married an Oriya girl, Leena (once his classmate) and Suresh has married Alpana – also from Orissa. While staying in Moscow for years together for their studies, it was but natural that they should come quite close to each other, fall in love, and, in the end, get married.

As Suresh and Prasant are Oriyas, they intended to return to Orissa eventually— this I sensed from my conversation with them.

They kept asking me about Orissa while I was absorbed in enjoying the fried fish, fish curry and fried crabs prepared by Namita. They expressed a wish to buy plots of land in Bhubaneswar and build houses there.

Namita was the centre of attraction among these Oriya families. Though Arun had spent many years in Moscow, he had not fallen in love with any Russian girl. A glance at Arun would make one think that he was lovable and I was sure many must have fallen in love with him. If a young man from a foreign land, travels in the metros of Moscow for two, three days, he would like to lose himself in the golden tresses of the beautiful women he would meet there.

Arun had married Namita in Orissa and had brought her over with him. Namita's desire to return to Orissa was intense than Arun's.

With whom would they talk in Oriya except the five or six Oriya families residing there? This was why there existed a strong bond among these families—fish and crab curries were but pretexts to get together in an alien land.

Translated from the Oriya by Priyambada Pal

(The writer visited Moscow in 1997.)

The Blue Waters of the Nile

It was arranged that we would sail down the Nile in a boat. These night cruises attracted a lot of tourists and brought the organizers good money. These boats are huge. The last quarter of the night on it is spent in dancing and singing and drinking hot beverages. The longest river in the world rises at Laksar and flows into the sea at Aswan.

The river is diverted into the city of Cairo and flowed past the hotel, where we resided. Many bridges are built across the river. Huge hotels and offices look down at the heart of the river. But we went 15 K.M. from Cairo to where the river was very wide. My friend, Varsne haggled with the driver of the vehicle and made him argue to accept fifty dollars. There were five of us. We paid ten dollars, each.

Our car stopped at the bank of the Nile, where two, three boats were moored. This river has turned a huge deserted country like Egypt into an oasis. The boatman told us in broken English that he would charge us two hundred pounds (seventy dollars) for the ride. We had to haggle with him for some time. He kept talking to us, a pipe in his mouth. At last, we settled for sixty dollars. We all boarded the beautifully decorated boat; the launch-boat started moving.

I had once ridden a motor-boat in river Brahmaputra in Guwahati. The restless currents of the river had scared me. But the boat kept moving slowly and smoothly down the Nile. Paddy fields stretched away on either side of the river. Palm and date-palm trees enhanced the beauty of the landscape. There were islets inside the

river. Cruising down the Nile was like boating in the vast waters of the Chilka Lake.

A young boy served us Coca-Cola and captured a few blissful moments in a camera. That camera was the only means of storing our memory of the boat-ride in River Nile. We cruised almost about an hour. But this did not make us feel tired at all.

The sight of people fishing with their fishing rods from small boats, and boats loaded with grass moving rapidly did not escape our eyes. Everywhere one looked, one saw only blue water. It seemed as if the Nile merged into the sky.

Bhubaneswar in Orissa lay far away from the Nile! While cruising down the Nile I was reminded of a verse written by poet Gopabandhu Das. I hummed:

'Stop a while, O iron monster

Let me enjoy the beauty of Chilka.'

My friend, Varsne bantered in Hindi, 'What's the matter, dear poet? You start singing? If you fall so deeply in love with the river, what will happen to the cruise?'

Suddenly I was reminded of the Nile cruiser. Wine and music will flow in the boats anchored in the middle of the river. Our tickets had been booked in advance. The belly-dance show would begin at midnight and end at 3 a.m. From the chest down to the waist of the dancer was bare, one felt like caressing and kissing her.

The ticket cost one hundred fifty dollars, which was not a small amount. We remembered the Egyptian belief that our boat might not reach the bank if one did not drink of the waters of the Nile while cruising.

We had to go back to India. No matter how beautiful river Nile was, for us the dust particles of India was precious.

I said to my friends, 'Come, let's drink the water of this river.' It is said, 'Only those drink the water of river Nile will return to the banks.'

The boat had reached the banks and the boat-owner was smoking a pipe in a relaxed manner. Thanking him, we said, 'Sukran'. In Cairo, one has to give a tip every now and then and say, 'Sukran'. He got up, shook hands with us saying, 'Allan Wassu Allan' – meaning 'welcome'. The young man, who had taken us in the launch, remained standing there. We had completely forgotten that we had to give him a tip. Our driver was ready to take us back to Hotel Saphir, from where we would go to the Nile cruiser.

On the way, we saw crowded markets and groups of people sitting along the road and smoking pipes.

We were feeling happy for we saw the historic river Nile and cruised down it. If one is tight-fisted in a foreign land one will never be able to enjoy one's stay there. Visiting Cairo is meaningless if one goes back without spending some time in the Nile cruiser, seeing the Gaza pyramids, taking a camel ride and enjoying the beverages and perfumes of Papirose.

There was a spacious hall inside the beautifully decorated boat, which resembled a five star hotel. The dance programmes took place and special dishes were served. Half the people present there were foreigners – each of them eager to enjoy the company of a Cairo woman. A wave of elation swept over them as they enjoyed the company of a woman being far away from their wives.

We, four friends, sat around a table. There were many young couples present there. Most of the foreign tourists were either couples or lovers. One enjoyed the drinks more than the songs and the dance. A variety of non-vegetarian foods and drinks were served to us. The body of the belly dancer looked strikingly beautiful.

We felt drowsy. But we saw how dollars flowed out of the tourists' pockets who had lost themselves in enjoying the transitory bliss. And this explained how Nile cruisers brought prosperity to Cairo.

The lights illuminating the boats in river Nile and the lights in the city of Cairo produced an illusion of daylight. As we walked back slowly to Hotel Saphir in that still quarter of the night we saw cars cluttering the road and heard the barking of street dogs.

Translated from the Oriya by Priyambada Pal

(The writer visited Egypt in 1998.)

Essay

Communalism and Indian Democracy

The controversy Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid snowballed into a national crisis and, today, a major political party is playing the Hindu communal card aggressively. The result has been large-scale communal riots throughout the country. Our country is facing a moment of truth: Will we permit our own civilization and democracy to wither into an idea whose time is gone?

The Indian population of India comprises of several religious groups i.e., Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains etc. However, communalism in India is limited mainly to two religious groups, namely, Hindus and Muslims. Both the communities nurse many prejudices against each other and construct stereotypes of each other.

Prejudice is a failure of rationality, a failure of justice or a failure of compassion in an individual. This prejudice has resulted in disharmony, hatred, dislike, schism and separatism and ultimately in communal riots. British imperialism had fostered these prejudices in both the communities and pitted the communities against each other. This has led to the formation of Muslim League, which demanded the partition of India.

Prior to British rule, India was ruled by Muslim rulers and in the medieval world, people had virtually no role in the political decision-making processes and many of them, especially the lower castes, were denied access to temples. So, the masses of India who were illiterate, ignorant and brutally subjugated by the kings, landlords, made peace with alien rulers and Islam spread in the

country and both the communities in the course of time formed a composite culture.

At the time of the freedom movement, Indian nationalism has to confront and oppose communalism as a divisive and anti-democratic force, be used by the imperialists to divide the people of India and undermine their struggle for freedom. The independence attained in 1947 is actually a compromise with imperialism, which accepted the partition of the country along communal lines. But the makers of modern India adopted a Constitution, which embodies secular and democratic values because only a secular and democratic order can ensure a united India. Also, the observance of law and respect for the constitution by the people and the state constitute the bedrock of democracy.

'Secular' is used in relation to religious tradition. Religion has two dimensions: personal experience and beliefs and social engineering. Personal experience and belief are not a matter, which could be discussed and debated. The second dimension forms a part of custom and tradition. These are built around the knowledge base of a society. A change in the knowledge base and the vision of a society may generate a knowledge, which is called secular. Hence, the secular is concerned with the affairs of the world, not the spiritual or the sacred, and secularism consists in the belief that morality or education should not be based on religion. The process of secularisation is fuelled by the search for knowledge, which becomes more scientific as time passes. And science-based knowledge becomes a powerful instrument in peoples' larger struggle for a better life, for dignity and honour.

Today communalism focuses on religion identity in India. In order to deal with communalism, we need to understand religion and the problem of religious identity. History shows that religions arose as the ideology and practices of powerful progressive movements but, with the passage of time, they became reactionary

forces in social life and got manipulated by ruling classes for their own ends. The ruling classes used religion to make common people accept an unequal and iniquitous social order. However, the importance of religion must never be underestimated as a social force. It is a reality and a power to reckon with. It persists as a significant element in our personal identity. But all organized religions, even though they remain peaceful and preach co-existence at one time can become explosive and quite murderous in another.

History has witnessed unparalleled intolerance, fighting, killing and hatred condoned in the name of religion. This religious animosity is not only confined to Hindus or Muslims. It engulfs different sects within the same religious order. Hence, Gandhiji wrote, 'The pages of the world history are soiled with the bloody accounts of these religious wars. When you look at these religions as so many leaves of a tree, they seem so different, but at the trunk, they are one.' Swami Vivekananda, in his Chicago address, said, 'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, oh! Lord! The different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight all lead to these.' And he added, 'I do not mean the different languages, rituals, books etc., employed in various religions, but I mean the eternal soul of every religion, I believe that they are not contradictory, they are supplementary.'

But then the Indian ruling classes have always found in religion, religiosity most useful tool for reinforcing their hegemony, their ideological dominance and social control over common people, making easier the latter's continued acceptance of an unjust and iniquitous social order. The political parties have never been averse to exploiting religion, or communalism to a greater or lesser degree in their struggle for power.

So, communalism in contemporary India as an ideology and a practice is, above all, an aspect of the politics of the ruling classes in

a society burdened with a feudal-colonial, inheritance, deep religious divisions and undergoing its own historically specific form of capitalist development. Here, all the evils of capitalist development, semi-feudalism, bureaucratisation, and bourgeois politics daily enter man's life and reinforce each other. As Romesh Thappar said, 'Some strange kind of corrupted capitalist growth, as Marx has said, 'We suffer not only from the living but from the dead also.'

As a result, the national life in India today is corrupt, communalised and criminalised. The heightening of communalism today is simultaneously the product of social, moral and political crises in society and the response of the ruling classes to this crisis. Communalism is used to win votes, fragment and divide the people and above all, secure continued political and ideological dominance of the ruling classes over them.

Today, Indian society and politics are steadily sliding into anarchy and authoritarianism or mafia control. In such a situation, communalism may contribute to the rise of a distinctively Indian form of fascism. If and when such fascism arrives it will certainly intensify oppression of the minorities. If there will be something 'Hindu' about Indian fascism, its ideological mask will be Hinduised nationalism.

The commonsense understanding of communalism is that it is the opposite of nationalism. Indian nationalism has to confront and oppose communalism as an anti-democratic force. Nationalism is determined by its specific character, its programmes and leadership, and, above all, by the concrete historical conjuncture. Pre-Independence nationalism in India was progressive because it aimed at resolving the basic structural contradictions of Indian society and resolved to fight against imperialism. So, nationalism as an ideology has been used by the ruling classes to consolidate their rule at home or to capture power has now been well and properly appropriated by the Bharatiya Janata Party. The ruling classes used nationalism in the normal pursuit of their interest or, when faced with a situation of

crisis in the polity, it has often taken all sorts of racist or fascist or imperialist forms, providing ideological support or cover to the emergence of reactionary authoritarian regimes.

Today, Indian society finds itself in a deep social and moral crisis. Economic development here is unequal and uneven. It has produced only poverty and hunger. People live in heart-breaking, inhuman conditions. A society burdened by old and new forms of oppressions, insecurities with no jobs or ideals for the youth or vision and values for the people ends up becoming a cradle of fundamentalism and communalism.

The need of the hour is to face the challenge. 'Challenge to produce its effect needs the co-operation between the trinity of the challenge, the challenger and the challenged', said Toyanbee. Communalism based on religion is to be challenged in promoting true religion and spreading the scientific temper among the masses. The struggle against communalism has to be a revolutionary struggle, Indian people's larger struggle for a better life and find out unity not only among different sects of the same religion, but also among all the religions of the world. We have emphasized differences; now the time has come to emphasize oneness.

The idea underlying Indian culture was succinctly summed up in the Rig-Vedic mantra, 'Ekam Sad, Vipra Bahudha Vadanti'—Truth is one, but sages call it by various name.

One should pay heed to the words of patriot-saint, Swami Vivekananda. He not only led two prolonged attacks against sectarianism by revealing their essential oneness and exposing the hollowness of their claim to exclusive possession of truth and the folly of magnifying differences and quarrelling over non-essentials. In his own words, 'I do not mean the different languages, rituals, books, etc., employed in various religions but I mean the internal soul of every religion. I believe that they are not contradictory, they are supplementary.' Our aim should be to widen the boundaries until they are lost sight of and to realize that all religions lead to God.

(*Collected Essays*, The Book Point: Bhubaneswar, 2008)

Economic and Political Situation of the World and Role of Labour

The Director General of the World Labour Organisation, Mr Juan Somabhia said last year that countries throughout the world should take action to eradicate poverty. If one scrutinizes the economic situation of the world today one finds that (1) 1.2 billion people in the world live on only one dollar per day and 1.6 billion people live on 1 to 2 dollars a day (2) 20% of the world's population, which is 86 million people, are uneducated (3) 115 million children do not go to school (4) 211 million children from five years to fourteen years of age work as child labourers. (5) 186 million people work under depressing conditions (6) 111 million people are employed in dangerous working conditions (7) 5 lakh women die every year during child birth (8) 799 million people do not get nutritious food to eat (9) 3,35.000 people die in accidents at their workplace (10) two thirds of women in developing countries work in unorganised sectors.

Apart from this, 85% of the world population live in poor countries but their share in international business is 25% while their loan from foreign countries amounted to fifty billion American dollars in 1964. Now it amounts to 2.6 trillion American dollars. These poor countries have been able to pay back only 5.4 trillion American dollars of this amount between 1982 and 2003. As a result of this, 500 million people lived in abject poverty twenty-five years ago. The number has now risen to 800 million people. 150 million children in poor countries are born underweight, and they die prematurely. 325 million children do not go to school. Child mortality rate in these countries

is 12% compared to rich and developed countries. 33 thousand children die every day of diseases, which are curable. Two million girls take to prostitution out of compulsion. Out of 85% of people in the poor countries only thirty percent of the people have access to electricity, 25% use coals and 15% use firewood.

The human race finds itself in this predicament as a result of globalisation. The new economic policy aims at removing all hindrances in the path of the concentration of wealth. This makes us feel those who have wealth and power rule the world. But nothing is done for the welfare of the poor and weaker sections of society. Trade unions participate in the movement that aims to counter these tendencies. They have suggested the following:

1. Stop giving loans – the World Bank and the International monetary fund should desist from advancing loans

2. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund should stop recommending structural adjustments, emphasize sacking, non-recruitment and reduce spending.

3. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund should make the report of all their board meetings and project agreements public.

4. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund should pay compensation for the loss caused due to structural adjustments. It should pay people who suffer loss due to the building of big dams. It should pay compensation for the economic, social, cultural and environmental hazards that result from such projects.

5. The World Bank should immediately stop providing loans, advice and help to big corporations. The International Finance Corporation and multi-lateral investment guarantee agencies should be wound up.

6. Action should be taken against the employees and agents of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund who indulge in acts of exploitation. The constitution, stability and policies of these

organizations should be evaluated. The countries which are now facing hardships due to this should be helped by counselling them in a transparent way.

Labourers worldwide have been protesting against the increasing concentration of wealth. Whether it is in Seattle or in Cancun, more attention is now paid to the problems faced by labourers in the movement against globalisation. Government workers in France launched a strike against the government for reducing the wages of the labourers. Workers of American United Parcel Services have carried out strikes throughout the country. In Korea, the strikes have led to the closure of big motor companies. Strikes have affected many corporations in India, Nepal and Philippines. The unemployed youth in Argentina carried out a mass strike and closed the national highway as a result of which the government is now making provisions for creating employment opportunities for them. Workers in unorganised areas have mobilised people to demand housing, water and electricity. The workers in Venezuela have successfully fought against the plot against the Hugo Chavel government hatched in America.

Labourers in Italy and Spain participated in a national strike. Workers in Germany protested against the wage differences between the West Germany and the East Germany. Children joined the six lakh government corporation workers in the strike against privatisation initiatives in South Korea. Workers in the McDonald Company in Paris struck work for one hundred five days demanding higher wage.

The plan to privatise the supply of electricity in Canada has been shelved by a court order due to the strike of workers there. Labourers in Pakistan observed a black day to register their protest against dictatorship. Workers in Nepal have raised their voice against the emergency declared there. Trade unions united to revolt against the Trade Union Act 160 in Brasilia. There was a worldwide protest on 10 March 2005 demanding the removal of American troops based

in Iraq. Workers in India have been successful in carrying out strikes unitedly throughout the country.

Whatever may be the shape of the labour revolution now, labour organizations will have to become even more organized in order to fight effectively against the concentration of wealth. On many occasions, owners of states and industries work against the creation of unions. If the labouring classes choose to spearhead the movement for social independence then the trade unions must show them the way. The trade unions must set an example of establishing a republic for the labouring classes. The number of unorganised labour is much larger in comparison to that of organized labour. The number of unemployed young people is increasing day by day. Hence, the need of the hour is to unite the organized and unorganised workers and create opportunities for employment for those who are unemployed. Because, if attention is not paid to these factors, the future of organized labour will be in jeopardy. Along with this we have to take the help of other groups, too. For this there should be cooperation between workers and those involved in environmental and consumer movements.

What is the aim behind the protest of workers? Why should workers unite? If one of the objectives behind this protest is to eliminate differences between the rich and the poor or ensuring social equality, will this be possible within an economic system where there is such a concentration of wealth? Hence trade unions must define their goals before taking any step. Their aim should be to bring about a change in the lifestyle of people and protect their rights and empower them. For this, the trade unions must take the help of the youth, migrant labourers and women. This will enable them to give their movement against the so-called benevolent economy a mass base.

Translated from the Oriya by Priyambada Pal

(*Collected Essays*, **The Book Point: Bhubaneswar, 2008**)

The Present Day Education System

There were a few students in the university auditorium looking quite excited, as their classes had been suspended. The lecturers were in a relaxed mood because it was a half-holiday. They had assembled to attend a lecture on the life and ideas of Swami Vivekananda in the auditorium. Swamiji was one of those great men who made the world aware of the glory of India across the world in the nineteenth century. Moreover, he played a key role in instilling feelings of patriotism in the hearts of freedom fighters, feelings that intensified the freedom struggle. Above all, he encouraged the youths of India to dedicate themselves to the cause of bringing about the all-round progress of mother India. He declared that education is the only medium through which we can work for the development of the underprivileged and the helpless that get exploited by some more powerful and affluent groups. Only a few students, teachers and employees were present in the auditorium to listen to and enjoy the lecture on this great philosopher, revolutionary, patriot and saint. Is this not a sign of the moral degradation of our university-level education system? In 1985, a committee was constituted by the education department of the central government. Its report titled 'Challenge of Education- a Policy Perspective' says— 'Thoughtful people are greatly disturbed by the erosion of values. This erosion is pervasive in schools, colleges and universities, amongst teachers as well as students. This is a highly dangerous development.'

The aim of education is to increase national awareness, which will help build the character of the youth, who will come forward to

build the nation. This is the reason the report lays great stress on scientific temper, democracy, moral and spiritual values.

In India, education is based on the fundamental truths of the Vedanta. The true aim of education is to enable man to manifest the immeasurable inner divinity already existing in him. Therefore, education consists in the development of the inner self, to which *The Upanishads* have given the name 'the Brahman'. Now the question is: how this inner development will be possible. Firstly, affection or, in other words, believing in oneself, is what is needed most. Faith in oneself can be attained only by observing self-restraint and maintaining a life of celibacy. Education is instrumental in character building. It enhances the power of the mind and enriches the source of knowledge. As a result, one becomes independent of others. Success will knock at one's door if the mind is restrained and desires are controlled. As a big tree springs from a small seed, a child can grow up to become a great person. As present-day education is bereft of values, it has become utterly devoid of essence and has lost all sense of direction.

According to British psychologist R.D Liya, for children who take birth in the United States, the possibility of ending up in a lunatic asylum instead of joining a university is a very large one. No wonder, the kind of education we provide them turns them mad.

The 1985 education report mentions that the present-day education system is creating 'snobbishness'. Many students are going to foreign universities to earn higher degrees but they are not coming back to India. They don't even remember that the Indian Government has spent at least one lakh rupees on the education one student. Those who received their education at the expense of ordinary taxpayers work only for themselves without sparing a thought for these poor people. What can they be called except 'traitors'? This happens because our culture has been drained of all its vitality. On the one hand, students are gaining knowledge of computers and atoms; on

the other, they miserably fail in gaining victory over their minds and hearts. If a doctor doesn't become sensitive though he knows how to use a stethoscope, that knowledge doesn't help him to enrich his inner self. It is said in the 1985 education report that 'teaching' and 'learning' have become temporary responsibilities. Education has become worthless, as it is limited only to providing and obtaining degrees. There are no other objectives except gaining degrees and getting a job. Very often degrees are being obtained by paying some money. It has become a common practice that during evaluation that examiners give an examinee more marks than he deserves. Therefore, those students who want to receive education not to get a job, but to make it a life enhancing process, find this kind of education utterly empty and worthless. Modern civilization should enable one to achieve a complete understanding of the values of life. University hostels are becoming the haven of anti-socials. Even some hostels harbour drug addicts. More and more students are getting addicted to drugs and alcohol. This not only wastes their time but also destroys their mental balance and leads them to commit serious crimes. According to psychologists, man is incomplete, and the aim of education is to develop man's physical, mental, spiritual and moral faculties. Again, respect for all religions enables man to become self-sufficient. If a person believes in one religion, it is likely that he/she may end up being a fundamentalist and as a result may fail in becoming a complete person. Present-day education needs to create spiritual persons. They can be moral because morality gets reflected in the feeling that the godly qualities that are within him/her are also present in his/her neighbours. According to psychologist, James C. Kaleman, 'We don't have the ideal picture of human behaviour.' Education involves a process of imitation. The child imitates his/her parents. Therefore, most people search for ideal persons in order to balance their personality. Swami Vivekananda is the ideal for the youths of India. Dedication and service are principles dear to India. 'Service to mankind is service to God'—this is what we call applied value education. This is also called 'Applied Vedanta'.

This principle of education is necessary for revitalizing India's system of education. This needs to be reflected in the new generation of teachers and textbooks, which should contain spiritual values and make the youth aware of Indian culture. At all levels, in all fields including science, education should be imparted. The goal of education should be shaping human beings, not getting jobs.

Firstly, importance should be given to the teachers so that they would impart quality education and Indianise education. There are some teachers in schools, colleges and universities who do their jobs sincerely. Their number, however, is very small. Some teachers are hostile to the education system because they have to work hard. Even some teachers are terribly busy in earning money by giving private tuition. As a result, the situation in colleges and universities is pretty bad. What can be done about it? Almost every educational institution lies under the shadow of politics. Colleges and universities are now divided into various groups, who are vying for power and position. The situation becomes such that teachers, employees and students get sucked into it and ugly incidents get reported in newspapers.

These days colleges and universities attract all manner of political parties. Even schools are not spared by them. They use students as instruments for achieving their political ends and they get them involved in various strikes and movements. Teachers and employees use politics as a weapon for securing promotion. One finds 'professional misconduct' instead of 'professional integrity 'among the teachers. In this case, the role of teacher associations assumes great significance. Teachers will be close to the students if proper procedures are followed while selecting them, if there is proper distribution of responsibilities, if they display professionalism, develop good understanding with each other, if they become sensitive, honest, simple and lastly if they have a good personality. Efforts will always be made to instil in them feelings of patriotism and to make them aware of their duties and responsibilities. The responsibility of political leadership, here, is immense. In the social system that

prevails today, people's faith in the political leadership is all but non-existent. Politicians sans values, crazy for power and position, are utterly self-centred. It is extremely unfortunate that they use teachers, students and even the educational system to further their vested interests. Now, the time has come to provide an opportunity to educationists, social activists and litterateurs untainted by political bias to give directions to society all levels. There is a need for mobilizing peoples' support and awareness in order to execute this.

Students have to realize that the education system is not meant to 'turn out clerks'. Before placing any student in any position, s/he should be required to work with the people of an underdeveloped and inaccessible area. Posts like lecturer, doctor, engineer, officer should not be offered to anyone on the basis of written examination only; rather, the candidate has to work for two years in the relevant field. In this case, no undue favour should be extended to anyone. Universalisation of education is to be achieved making sure that spiritual values are inculcated in the students. Considerations relating to caste, creed and religion should be ignored. A lifeless education will lead to a distortion of the social system, as man sans morality becomes a brute.

The need to transform the present-day education system is an urgent one. Otherwise, the social system will disintegrate and it will take human civilization a long time in order to reconstruct it. We cannot do better than to cite a few lines of the *Eesh* Upanishad—

'Those people who have killed their self, they have to lead their life in stark darkness without a little ray of sunlight.'

Translated from the Oriya by Pramod K. Das

(*Collected Essays*, The Book Point: Bhubaneswar, 2008)

Standing on One's Own Feet

A hamlet. A river flows past it. I sat on the riverbank and wanted to relax as I was thoroughly worn out. Some of the organizers of the meeting requested me, saying, 'Sir, you please come into the room.' As I was keen on spending some time with nature, I requested them to allow me to sit there and fell into talk with them. Though all of them had degrees like M.A. and B.Ed., still they were all unemployed and were looking for jobs. They had plans to get lecturers' jobs by paying bribes. Nothing except the search for jobs mattered to them. They had obtained M.A. degrees four, five years back. They were financially not well of as they were as they belonged to middle class and lower middle class families. They found themselves in the same boat; their only aim was land government jobs.

I took a good look at them. Their eyes had no lustre. They seemed utterly bereft of energy. It was obvious that they did not want to anything for their country. They had lost their self-confidence and their sense of identities. A fascination for foreign culture and civilization had led them to forget their own culture and civilization.

The meeting started a little late. I gave a speech on Swami Vivekananda. The despair of these youths, their desperate search for jobs and their loss of self-confidence had already affected my mind deeply. I reminded them of Swamiji's statement: 'If a cobbler prepares a pair of shoes with commitment that cobbler is greater than a lecturer who always shouts.' If we are ready to accept Swamiji's statement that education is manifestation of inner perfection, the first duty of a young person is to build himself or herself. A young person should feel that *tatwamasi aahambramosi*. This means each person has indomitable potency; the need is to utilise these powers. Every

individual has to believe that they are born to perform great works. Though there are a bundle of purposes in life, the final aim or goal is one. So each young person has to prepare a specific master plan for life. There is a need to make a balance between the final goal and the other goals. Therefore, our goal should necessarily be well and specific. For that we should see the difference between good and bad. We have to know the differences between truth and false, reality and imagination and we have to work accordingly with strong determination.

Now the time has come to voice against the social ills and evils. We should be aware of the various conditions responsible for pulling down oneself and work accordingly to avoid the pitfalls. Spiritual power and modern science needs to be collaborated in order to make the youth stand on their own.

The young persons listened to the speech and it seemed to me as if they were promising themselves to stand on their own feet in response to calls of Swami Vivekananda.

Each human being has two sides: the personal and the social. Though they are a part of this society, nevertheless they have their own individuality. Their progress is not possible if s/he does not try to lay emphasis on both these sides. Therefore, Swamiji said, '*Atmono Mokshayarthe Jagadhitaya*' which means each individual has to work for his/her salvation and, at the same time, s/he has to work for the welfare of the whole world. One must make sure while doing this, that to serve the people of this society means to provide them with what they ask for. Their first duty is to make them self-reliant. By opening their eyes, we have to help them recover their lost individuality.

We are faced with a crisis because the youth in the modern world have lost their sense of individuality. According to a recent survey, the total number of unemployed youth in rural India is 214.5 million. Out of them, 121.3 million are in the 15-24 age group and

93.2 million belong to the 25-34 age group. The problems that these youths encounter are internal and external. The internal problems are:

1. The real world is not able to fulfil their desires.

2. The education system does not provide the kind of training that would equip one to cope with the problems of daily life.

3. Unemployment, which makes it difficult for them to make a living

4. Old people entertain a low opinion of the youth.

5. The evils of regionalism, communalism and casteism pollute the environment in which the youth live.

6. The social system is stagnant. It's unable to respond positively to novelty.

7. Lack of self-confidence and the will to help oneself

The external problems are social, economical and mental in nature.

What are the social problems facing the youth? They are:

1. The youth have little faith in the contemporary education system.

2. They cannot understand what people need.

3. They are trying to move away from village life.

4. The education system is unable to provide them with the training, which would make the youth employable. Instead, it creates opportunities for them to become clerks.

5. They have lost the desire to work.

6. And the situation has become such that in the rural areas young men find it difficult to find life-partners.

7. It is impossible on their part to meet their daily needs

8. Nobody encourages him/her to realize the immense potential those are within him/her.

In order to encounter the above-mentioned social problems the youth of rural India face certain economic problems, which are:

1. Lack of capital, which could help them become self-reliant.

2. Problems in getting loans from banks

3. Unable to meet their daily expenditure

Absence of opportunities to receive technical education. As a result, they are in despair. All this creates certain mental problems, which are as follows:

1. Lack of self-confidence

2. Hatred towards the government

3. Consumption of alcohol and others intoxicants, which results in violent behaviour and suicide

4. Obsession with the behaviour of political leaders

The youth in rural areas are forced to shift to urban areas in order to earn their livelihood and to get social, economic and mental problems out of their way, as there are no other alternatives available to them. However, they lose their identities in the urban environment. There is an urgent need to tap the potential of the youth community as they embody the future of this country. The famous economist, Galbraith observes that the progress of a country cannot be accelerated by ignoring human beings and amassing wealth. Emphasis is not being laid upon individuals as they are being treated as purely social and economic beings. Swami Vivekananda emphasized that no system can develop itself unless it finds ways of utilizing its human capital. To clarify this further, in an interview with *London Times*, in 1886, Swamiji said that human beings are the most valuable assets of the country. The laws of the parliament have never been able to make a country great. It is its people whose are talents make the country great. Therefore, the need to enlighten the inner self of man is an urgent one. This can be done by applying the principles of the *Vedanta* to an individual's life. *Vedanta* will help in making the

luminosity that lies within human beings shine forth. If we ignore the teachings of the *Vedanta*, no individual will be able to accept social responsibility. The *Vedanta* is immensely relevant for the modern-day youths. We must realize this truth.

The *Vedanta* tells us how to stand on one's own feet. But why the *Vedanta*? The easiest answer to this question is that, if a person wants to serve a country, s/he has to become aware of its national identity. S/he must be able to relate to the past of that country. The knowledge and idealism of foreign countries have not helped India. The simplicity and lucidity of the *Vedanta* will help in bringing the conflict between tradition and modernity to an end. The *Vedanta* is not hostile to science and social sciences. Marxism did not work for India, because it did not recognize human values and universal idealism in every form of idealism. Human values include love, truth, honesty etc. The basic principle and final aim of all religions are the same. The Vedanta, therefore, can help us in finding solutions to the problems faced by the modern-day youth. And give them a new direction Let's take a look at our education system. It has failed utterly in eradicating the problems of this country. Now the time has come to see how these problems can be wiped out at national level with the help of education. If we are able to understand and identify the problems of our country, show the determination to solve them, certainly we'll be able to move forward the nation. To do this we must lay stress on character making. The youth should build their character first. Our nation's character has been corrupted. Few things can be done without giving or receiving bribe. Every one is affected in one way or another by this evil. If character is built, the process of development gets accelerated. What do we mean by character? If every individual seeks to develop himself and his society. Such a person thinks society's interest before thinking of his own interest. Instead of this, if one looks at individual's interest first and then society's interest, corruption takes place. It is clear; therefore, that emphasis should be laid on character. As Swami Vivekananda said,

'My idealism can be expressed in a few words. That is by educating each individual, they will be asked to enliven their godliness in each moment.' This is the *Vedanta* speaking through Swamiji. Every human being should feel the presence of truth, which lies within him. Having felt this truth, making one's behaviour embody this is called character.

So, in order to build our own character, we have to look within. If we'll be able to feel in ourselves the process of that virtuous *brahma satta* (inner self), we'll be able to build our characters. Indian idealism is based on renunciation and service. If we'll be able to put this into practice in our own self, life will go in the right direction. This is why in *the Bhagabata Gita* says, 'Those persons who see happiness and sorrow of all others as their own are the greatest yogis.'

We have to become yogis in order to stand on our own feet.

Translated from the Orlya by Pramod K. Das

(***Vedanta ra Swara*, Gadya Prakashani: Bhubaneswar, 1996)**

Something Writers Should Reflect Upon

I wrote letters to some well-known and reputed writers of Orissa regarding my wish to write a book about them. I cannot say if they received the letters. I believe they did for most of them were sent personally. Except one or two, none of them wrote back. To my surprise two of the writers, whom I had written to, called me up asking me to send them their own books! I had never imagined that writing a book on eminent writers I would end up in providing books to them.

I am not writing this to complain against anyone. Rather, its purpose is to look at the matter from a broader perspective. Because, whenever we give a talk regarding the deterioration of our language and literature or the dwindling number of readers, we go on giving big advice, but fail to follow these ourselves.

It is unfortunate that writers in Orissa, though they are busy carving a niche for themselves and are doing their best to raise their social standing, show no interest in helping other writers to grow. How can meaningful relationships be built with a mentality like this? And how will it help writers in knowing each other personally?

Another fact which assumes greater importance is the role of writers in society. Do they play their part well? Here too, we see them revolving around their own axes. The centre of all writing is the human being. The writer gives deep thought to the relationship between human beings and society and expresses it in a creative way. The desire for self-promotion should never lie there but many

writers, while giving shape to the sorrows, pain or revolutionary feelings inside them, forget who their readers will be.

Of course, the writer writes for himself. He makes his characters embody features of the world he perceives and explores. Though he is the first reader of his books, his opinions remain confined to himself. Unless others respond to them, they fail to exercise any impact on society. True, the writer is not a social or political worker, but can he detach himself from the social and political realities?

Besides this, the writer should seek to influence the social and political life of the world he lives in. because he has ability to think, analyse and form opinions. We hear voices of political leaders, social workers and journalists. But almost nowhere is a writer's voice heard. He is also not given the opportunity to show the reasons behind this. It would be proper to say that he is quite indifferent about presenting his views. The writer probably takes propagation of his views to be a threat to his independence and does not use it as a tool to perform his duty.

Does the writer refrain from expressing his views because he is financially not well off? I do not think this is the case for writers in Orissa enjoy a reasonable good position in society and they are economically well off because most of them are government servants, businessmen or researchers. They do not bother in the least about whether their books will get published or whether readers will buy them. Rather, they aim at becoming members of committees, receiving awards, gaining political clout, and travelling to foreign countries. Otherwise, why would there be such cut-throat competition for winning the Sahitya Akademi Award, getting elected to the decision making bodies of Utkal Sahitya Samaj, Orissa Sahitya Academy?

How will writers express their independent views if they remain preoccupied with cultivating people in position of power so that they could maximize their benefits? This way the writer creates a distance between himself and society.

The reason behind a writer's voice becoming increasingly feeble is his diffidence. Many things have happened and keep happening in our country. Why has no writer expressed his opinion on the riot in Gujarat? A super cyclone devastated Orissa. But no one criticized the inefficient way in which the situation was tackled. The politicians are probably aware of this indifference on the part of the writers and they therefore do not attach any importance to them. Hence, seldom is a writer's voice heard. But if the writers unite, they can bring about a revolution in society.

But will this ever happen in Orissa? If writers will come forward to protect the public would automatically extend their support and co-operation. But will our eminent, learned writers do so? Every writer has emotions and his own way of expressing them. The moment they will get together to express their emotions, they will become a force that brings about radical change in society. Thereafter, they will be able to give voice to those who do not have it and will be able to give expression to people's views. If an accomplished writer is unable to write about the voiceless, then his ability to bring about meaningful social change will be put to question. This will help writer's work attain a timeless quality.

Translated from the Oriya by Priyambada Pal

(Mo Bhasa Mo Sahitya, Gadya Prakashani: Bhubaneswar, 1996)

The Publishing Scene in Orissa

So many things come to our mind when we discuss the problems of publishing in Orissa. Ordinary people lay more emphasis on conversation not on reading books. As a result from the primary school level interest in reading books is not promoted. Therefore, more emphasis should be laid on children's literature.

What is the situation of children's literature in Orissa? Noted writers and poets are likely to be aware of this. There is a need to publish books containing all varieties of subjects in order to create interest among young children. For example, it is seen that the sale of *Janhamamu* and *Chandamama* is so huge that no other children's magazine book has come any where near it, although *Janhamamu* is not so useful for children. *Sishulekha*, published by the government of Orissa, is not more than a drop of water in the ocean. Lack of interest in reading from childhood is the main cause of the small size of readership in Orissa. Again, the problem is compounded by the literatures of Telugu, Hindi and Bangla published from the neighbouring states. .

The publishing industry in our neighbouring states like Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal is quite advanced. So, to the readers of Telugu, Hindi and Bangla books are available in low-price editions. A reader can devote at best four hours to reading books in a day. A good reader needs to be convinced of the value of a book before reading it because of the limited time available to him for reading. In this case, the role of discussion and criticism cannot be overestimated.

What is the aim of reading books? To familiarise ourselves with one's own culture. Of course, we can find out about changes taking place in our world through TV and other media. But in order

to make the great Indian culture survive and flourish we have to place emphasis on reading books. We have to create a taste for literature among readers. The absence of discussion, the right social and political ambience are largely responsible for the lack of interest in reading.

When we speak of interest in reading, we mean that it includes the publication of books and the impact of these books upon society and readers' awareness. From this point of view, the number of high quality books is limited. A good book has a print run of a thousand copies in its first edition. Rarely do we see it going into a second edition.

Lord Bacon said, 'Reading makes a complete man.' This statement needs to be mulled over by the modern man. Many people think that one can become a complete man by reading newspapers, listening to the radio, watching television and films. There is a general opinion that deep conviction and faith infuse words with power and these words are disseminated by modern media. But, though it boosts civilization, it hinders the fostering of cultural values.

The Central government has introduced formal and non-formal education in order to create an interest in reading among people. At the primary school level, one needs to acquire a general idea about the world. Primary education reaches only to one-thirds of the people and not to the remaining part of population. As a result, books that are bought by the government include textbooks and dictionaries etc. Most of these books lack quality. So stress should be laid on the quality of publications.

Interest in reading has not been created by disseminating those books, which were published in the past. Instead of using epics like the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*, to promote interest in reading attempts are being made to use these books for religious purposes.

A writer writes for readers. If it is not written keeping the readers' views or interests in mind it may or may not be accepted by the readers

So the creativity of the writer and the interest of the readers depend largely on the writer's attitudes towards his readers. Therefore, it is imperative that a writer should have wide experience. When s/

he talks of the lives of common people, s/he should be able to feel the emotions of those people. As a result, a writer will be able to present meaningful values to readers whom he does not know.

The number of publication unit is small in Orissa. These don't pay much attention to the quality of books while selecting these books as their profit largely comes from publication of textbooks and supply of books to government libraries. An environment, which promotes the reading habit among people does not exist in the state. Interested in works on literature, which are considered to be the base of our cultural foundation is minimal. For this reason, there is a five to ten years elapse before the books of great writers Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopinath Mohanty, Surendra Mohanty and others go through a second edition. Works of high literary quality often do not find a publisher. What is needed is a change in the attitude towards literature and to create a larger field for literature. If interest in reading is created in people, the way for the publication of quality books will be paved. The publication of quality books, a library movement and wide circulation of good books for children would change things for the better. Moreover, discussion on and criticism of books in the media should be encouraged. If such a situation can be created, publishing will not have to depend on the government; they will be able to survive and flourish by selling books to a large readership.

Translated from the Oriya by Pramod K. Das

(***Mo Bhasa Mo Sahitya***, **Gadya Prakashani: Bhubaneswar, 1996)**

The Autobiography of a Communist

The number of autobiographies in Oriya literature is not very large. And the few who have written their autobiographies have not told the whole truth. They have done so as they want to show themselves in the best possible light. The truth lies concealed. Autobiographies help in writing history. It would not be wrong to consider the life history of a person as the history of a community, society or a nation. The life histories of Gandhi, Jawaharlal, Patel and others are part of Indian history. The history and literature of any country is considered rich, if we find a lot of autobiographies there.

There are some who may not have attained a high position in society; yet their lives provide us with inspiring examples. When we read their life stories; we cannot help feeling great respite and affection for them. They enlighten others by burning themselves. Their autobiographies find publishers with great difficulty. Serving their nation they chose as their only way of life and they never soiled themselves with dirty politics. They are incorrigible idealists.

There are many who never get down to writing their autobiographies, let alone publishing them. If ever they write their autobiographies, finding a publisher becomes a Herculean task for them. Even if they manage to get their autobiographies published, they find it difficult to give them publicity.

I would like to draw the reader's attention to one such autobiography. There is no doubt that this autobiography deserves a pride of place in the history of Oriya literature. This book is written

by none other than Gokul Mohan Chudamani, and the name of the book is *Raktashikta Khurdha Matire Sangram* (Struggle in the Blood-drenched Soil of Khurdha).

Gokul Mohan is eighty-five years old. He took part in the freedom struggle of India and he was a member of the State Executive Committee of Congress. In 1937, the course of his life changed. He joined the Communist Party. After joining it, he says, he imbibed the spirit of a new age. How could a Communist take birth in Congress? Gokul Mohan writes, 'One day I was sitting in my hotel. The leaf plates used for serving food were thrown outside. One woman was eating the leftover rice from those leaves. Two, three dogs came in and snatched a leftover leaf from her hands. I found the sight unbearable. I became a revolutionary to root out this evil. I tried to find out a solution to this problem. Earlier I had been told that it would be abolished if principles of egalitarianism and Marxism were translated into a reality. Therefore, I decided to join in the Communist Party.'

The life of Gokul Mohan is the life of a fighter. If he wished he could have continued to be a member of Congress. After independence, he could have become a minister. But instead of doing so, he chose to lead a life full of struggle. One finds in the autobiography of Gokul Mohan the history of a period in Orissan history. The way the book is put together reflects the austerity of Gokul Mohan's own way of life. The mantras of 'service and sacrifice' have lent greatness to his life.

Translated from the Oriya by Pramod K. Das

(***Mo Bhasa Mo Sahitya*, Gadya Prakashani: Bhubaneswar, 1996)**

LECTURE

Swami Vivekananda and Vedantic Socialism

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had inspired Swami Vivekananda to convey to mankind the sublime teachings of *Vedanta*— the oneness of truth, the divinity of man and the harmony of religions. So, Swamiji had declared, 'I have a message to the west as Buddha had a message to the east.'

The thought, teachings and message of Swamiji on socio-economic politics can be termed as practical vedanta or vedantic socialism. What then is Vedanta?

Vedanta is the culmination of knowledge, the sacred wisdom of the Hindu sages, the transcendental experience of the seers of Truth. The main tenants of Vedanta are:

- Brahman is the ultimate reality. It is existence, consciousness-bliss absolute. It is beyond name and form, devoid of qualities, without beginning or end. It is the unchanging truth beyond space, time and causation. When Brahman is associated with Maya, it is called God.
- The universe is apparent like water in a mirage, and continuously changing. We perceive the universe through space, time and causation. Space begins when one gets a body, time begins when one starts thinking and causation begins when one becomes limited. This beautiful, tangible universe disappears from one's awareness when one enters

into the sleep state or merges into *samadhi* and again it reappears in the walking state. So, this world is in mind.

- Human beings are divine. Their real nature is the Atman, which is infinite, eternal, pure, luminous, ever free, blissful and identical with Brahman. The goal of human life is to realise God and the purpose of religion is to teach one how to manifest the divinity within.
- How does one manifest the divinity within? Vedanta suggests four Yogas. i) Karma— the path of unselfish action, ii) Jnana—the path of knowledge, iii) Bhakti—the path of devotion, iv) Raja yoga- the path of mediation. Yoga means the union of the individual soul with the cosmic soul.
- Truth is one and universal. It cannot be limited to any country or race or individual. All religions of the world express the same truth in different languages and in various ways. Vedanta promulgates the harmony of religion. As different rivers originate from different sources but mingle in the ocean losing their names and forms, so all the various religious paths that human beings take through different tendencies lead to God or Truth.

There are three basic scriptures of Vedanta. i) *Upanishads*, ii) *Brahma Sutras*, and iii) *Bhagavad Gita*.

And we can trace the same truth of Vedanta from the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the *Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

Swami Vivekananda has used the following to build up his philosophy.

i. Vedanta, ii. Modern Science, iii. History, iv. His experience with people

The characteristics of his social philosophy can be summed up as:

i) It is based on history.

ii) It is scientific.

iii) It solves the present problem.

iv) It secures world peace and amity.

v) It makes man spiritually elevated.

Swamiji had brought a new and revolutionary concept of man, religion and revolution through his Vedantic philosophy.

He said, 'Man is potentially divine.' By saying so, he asserts that man is divine and every one should assert this divinity through self-effort, self-reliance and self-mastery. For this, he said, ' If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the *Upanishads*, bursting like a bombshell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word ' fearlessness', ' abhi'. He said, 'Strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal. Weakness is constant strain, misery, weakness is death.' He has formed his notion of man evidently from the writings of various philosophers.

Marx says, ' Man is a social animal and self regarding impulses work themselves out through channels determined by the social environment to which he is the subject.' Existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sarte says, 'There being one god there is at least one being whose existence came before its essence; a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it...Man.' Heideggar said, 'A man is nothing else but what he proposes, he exits only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but what life is'.

So, the theories above do not promise man joy, hope, strength, freedom for which he has an innate yearning. Prof. Sorokin says, ' The sensate culture did its best in the way of man to degrading the level of a mere reflex mechanism, a mere organ motivated by sex, a mere semi-mechanical, semi-psychological organism, devoid of any divine spark of any absolute value, of anything noble and sacred.'

Swamiji wanted a person to realise his divine self and thereby attain salvation. So, he impels the man to move from idea to idea, to break down the shackles of dead customs, traditions, superstitions, dogmas and meaninglessness of rituals. He asserts man's right to rebel against nature as well as the tyranny of tradition, customs, usages etc. He said, 'Eternal law cannot be freedom. If there is to be eternal law binding him all the time, where is the difference between him and a blade of grass? When the needs of the time press hard on it, society adopts customs of self-preservation. So he explored the theory of society over man. Instead of man's life being determined by society, society is made, moulded and remoulded to serve his purpose, the purpose of his self-realization. Swamiji's teachings dealt with the sphere of religion. He accepted the validity of all faiths and the authority of their founders, because he was certain that they were all identical in their essence, even though they differ in form. As *Rig Veda* says 'Ekam Sad Bipra Bahuda Badanti.' (God is one but wise men describe him in several ways). So Swamiji proclaimed through high philosophy or law, through the most exalted mythology or the grossest, through the most refined ritualism or arrant fetishism, every sect, every soul, every nation, every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward towards God, every vision of truth than man has is a vision of Him and none else.' Illustrating his point he referred to God as water and the different religion as vessels of different shapes and sizes, which contained this water. 'Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to fetch water from a lake. One has a cup, another jar, another bucket and so forth; and we all fill our vessels. The water in each case, naturally takes the form of the vessel carried by each of us. He who brought the cup, has the water is in the shape of the cup, he who brought the jar, his water is in the shape of the Jar and so forth. But in every case, water and nothing but water is in the vessel. So it is in the case of religion. Our minds are like these vessels and each one of is trying to arrive at the realisation of God. God is like that water filling three different vessels.

Yet, he is one. He is God in every case. This is the only recognition of universality that we can get.' Swamiji did not make practical Vedanta to a new religion to replace all existing religion. He wanted universality of the religion, 'Our watch word will be acceptance and not exclusion.' He again says, 'Religion is not in doctrine, in dogmas nor in intellectual argumentation, it is being and becoming. Temples, churches, books or forms are simply the kindergarten of religion, to make the spiritual child strong enough to take the higher steps. It is being and becoming.'

He says, ' Religion is the greatest motive power of realising the infinite energy which is the birth right and nature of everyman.' Religion is not Priest Craft. 'Priest Craft', He says, 'is in its nature cruel and heartless. That is why religion goes down where priest craft arises. So he denounced priest craft and said it is privilege making. Protesting against the statement that religion is responsible for all the evils in society, he said, ' For all the devilry that religion is blamed with, religion is not at all in fault, no religion ever prosecuted man, no religion ever burnt witches, what then incited people to do these things? Politics but never religion...'

He criticised the religion prevalent both in the east and west, as 'Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries.' So, explaining the necessity of religion he says, ' Without the knowledge of spirit, all material knowledge is only holding fuel to fore, giving into the hands of the selfish man, one more instrument to take what belongs to others, to live upon the life of others, instead of giving up life for them.' So, the religion could enrich the human life.

In the words of the Buddha, 'Everything... is burning. The eyes are burning, thoughts are burning, all the senses are burning. They are burning with the fire of lust. There is anger, there is ignorance, there is hatred' and, as long as the fire finds inflammable things upon which it can feed, so long will it burn, and there will be birth, death, decay, grief, lamentation, suffering, despair and sorrow.'

The answer to this question is not known to the sciences or the arts of the world, however profound they may be. The voice, again, brings the intimation:

'There is one supreme Ruler, the inmost self of all beings, who makes his one from manifest. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves—not to others.'

The great scientist Einstein puts it, 'Science with out religion is lame, religion without science is blind.' He was convinced that whatever the marvellous achievements that science may have in store, if humanity is to live meaningful life on this planet, there will never come a time when religion, understood in its essential sense, will be superfluous. Religion alone can give to science that sanity with out which it remains overwhelming a problematic achievement of humanity.

The voice of Vivekananda is re-echoed by Prof. Sorokin who says, ' The most urgent need of time is the man who can control himself and his lust, who can be compassionate to all his fellow men, who can see and seek for the eternal values of culture and society, and who deeply feels his unique responsibility in this universe.'

Even though the religious differences are marked at the surface, Swamiji said, 'Spiritual unity is the ultimate ground of all diversity.' So he dreamt of unity in variety and at the parliament of religion he declared, the Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to universal religion, he says, 'I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all. I worship God with everyone of them, in whatever form they worship of Him we take all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of present and open every window of the heart for all that are to come in the future.' So, the central theme of religion is the divinity of man. Swamiji says, 'Serve

Jiva as Siva.' He says, 'You may invent an image already exists, the living man. You may build a temple in which to worship God, that may be God but a better one, a much higher one, already exists, the Human Body. Ages ago Buddha said, that which is needed most is a loving heart.'

Prescribing religion for modern man, Swamiji says, 'All human knowledge is but a part of religion. Science and religion are both attempts to help us out of the bondage, only religion is the more ancient, and we have the superstition that is mere holy. In a way it is because it makes morality a vital point, and science does not.' 'Religion is Realization. It is being and becoming and not believing. So, Romain Rolland termed the religion propounded by Swami Vivekananda as 'Universal-Science' religion. This universal science religion Swamiji said, 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy by one or more or all of these and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms, are but secondary details.'

In his exposition of religion, Swamiji was aware of the reason. He asserts—' Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries or reason, through which any other concrete science discovers itself? Are the same method of investigation which we apply to science and knowledge outside to be applied to the science of Religion?' He himself gave the answer to these questions.

'In my opinion, this must be so, and I am also of the opinion that the sooner it is done, the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation, it was all the time useless, unworthy superstition and the sooner is done, it is better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant

out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific, as scientific, at least, as ay of the conclusion of physics, or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.'

Here religion shows true veneration for science and again religion challengingly comes out and bares its chest to any hostile arrow.

Albert Einstein opines that science cannot lead man out of the blinding darkness. In his words:

'The scientific method can teach us nothing else beyond how facts are related to, and conditioned by, each other. The aspiration towards such objective knowledge belongs to the highest of which man is capable...yet it is equally clear that knowledge of what it does not directly open the door to what should be. One can have the clearest and most complete knowledge of what is, yet not be able to deduce from that what should be goal of human aspirations. Objective knowledge provides us with the powerful instruments for the achievement of certain ends, but the ultimate goal itself and the longing to reach it must come from another source.' And what is the source? Einstein himself indicates that source quite clearly:

'To make clear these fundamental ends and valuations and to set them fast in the emotional life of the individual seems to me precisely the most important function which religion has to perform in the social life of man.'

Today, the task of religion is three fold.

i. To construct a supranational cohesive humanity

ii. To give a purposive direction to the whole process of civilization

iii. To the deeper spiritual consciousness of individual

Bhisma in *Mahabharat* says:

'Dharma (religion) was declared for advancement and growth of all creatures. Therefore what brings advancement and growth is religion.'

'Religion was declared for preventing creatures from injuring one another. Therefore, Dharma is that which prevents injury to creatures.'

Even the social thinker Dr B.R. Ambedkar said, 'some people think that religion is not essential to society. I do not hold this view. I consider the foundations of religion to be essential to the life and practices of society.'

He observed, 'It pains me to see youth growing indifferent to religion. Religion is not opium as it is held by some. What good things I have in me or whatever have been the benefits of my education I owe them to the religious feelings in me. I want religion and I do not want hypocrisy in the name of religion. And he said, 'Religion instils hope in man and drives him to activity. So, all change we see in this world are the manifestation of Brahman.' So, Swamiji's vedantic concept of religion meets out the challenges of modern science and the reason.

In the light of Neo-Vedanta Swamiji has succeeded in expanding our concept of history, society, evolution, political concepts like democracy, socialism, revolution and individual relation with collective bodies.

There is no doubt that giving a practical form to Vedanta, Vivekananda was influenced by what he saw of the country and its people during the period he wandered over India as a parivrajak, an itinerant monk. Intellectually he was advaitin or Vedantin and a votary of Jnana Yoga. But he was a devotee. His heart was moved by what he saw and respond to the overwhelming need of his people for economic and social betterment. It was through his contact with the Indian masses, their poverty, illiteracy, superstition and social degradation, that he was moved in fierce anger at the social system that permitted a few to exploit the many. His belief in Karma Yoga gave him the strength to look up to incessant works in the service of the poor as the motivation for all work. He understood that the Hindu

belief of salvation is nothing but selflessness and constitute surrender to the present age.

He was convinced that God is manifest in all human beings and especially so, in the poor, and the suffering for whom he coined the new word 'Daridra-Narayan'. He was sure to God through worship. He wrote a letter to his western friend on July 9, 1897. 'I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing surely that I have put in a lever from his good of humanity, in India, at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next. Anyway, I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all the souls-and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of species, is the special object of my worship.'

In a letter written from Chicago in November 1894 to an Indian friend, Swamiji says, 'Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions of India who are held fast by poverty, priest craft and tyranny. I am no meta-physician, no philosopher nay no saint but I am poor, I love the poor, who feels for the hundreds or millions of men and women sunken forever in poverty and ignorance? Who will bring light to them? Who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Him I call a Mahatma whose heart bleeds for the poor. Otherwise, he is a Duratma. So long the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold everyman a traitor who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them. I call those who struck about in their finery, having got all their finery, having got all their money by grinding the poor wretches, so long as they do not do anything for those two hundred millions who are now no better then hungry savages.'

Writing a letter to a friend at Madras on August 20, 1893 he said, 'Trust not the so called rich. The hope lies in you, in the weak, the lowly but the faithful. Have faith in the lord. Feel for the miserable

and look up for help. It shall come. I have travelled 12 years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed. It is not the work of a day and the path is full of the most deadly thorns. But Parthasarathy (Krishna as Arjun's Charioteer) is ready to be our Sarathi (Charioteer). In His name and with eternal faith in Him, set fire to the mountain of misery that has been heaped upon India for ages, and it shall be burned down. Hundreds will fall in the struggle; hundreds will be ready to take it. Do not look up to these so-called rich and great; do not care for the heartless intellectual writers, and their cold, blooded newspaper articles. Faith, sympathy, fiery faith and fiery sympathy. March on the lord is our General. Do not look back to see who falls, forward onward! Thus and thus we shall go on brethren. One falls and another takes up the work.'

In yet another letter written on October 27, 1894, he decried the confining of religion to books, dogmas and philosophy and declared, ' I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. Where should you go to seek God— Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak— god? Why not worship them first? I believe in God and believe even in going to Hell to save others.'

He wrote another letter to an Indian follower who wanted to be a Monk. 'The Gerua robe is not for enjoyment. It is the banner for heroic work. You must give your body, mind and speech to the welfare of the world, you have read *Matru Devo Bhava*, *Pitru Devo Bhava*, but I say *Daridra Devo Bhava*, *Moorkha Devo Bhaba*, meaning, 'The poor, illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted, let those be your God. Know that service to those alone is the highest religion.'

In his first speech at Madras on his return from America he spoke elaborately on his plan of campaign'. This has been published in the form of a book, *Lecture from Colombo to Almora*. It showed

his patriotism and unbounded love for the country. His patriotism was deep rooted. He had infinite love for masses and formed practical for their problems instead of reforms, on paper and emphasised on strength of will to overcome all hindrances.

In his lecture at Madras, he said, 'First feel from the Heart. Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of Gods and sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has formed over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone to your blood coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heartbeats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of the ruin and have you forgotten all about your name, fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies. Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot. The very first step. 'You may feel, but instead of spending your energies in filthy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, to bring them out of this living death?'

'That is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain high obstructions? If your wives and children are against you, if all your money goes, your name dies, your wealth vanishes, would you still stick to it? Have you got that steadfastness? If you have these things, each one of you will work miracles?'

Speaking on the future of India, he told his listeners, 'For the next fifty years, this alone should be our keynote. This our great mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear from our minds. This is the only God that is awake. All other Gods are sleeping. What vain Gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see around us? These are all our Gods, men and animals, and the first Gods we have to worship, instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other.'

As a patriot he said clearly and unambiguously, ' If there are holes in this national ship, this society of ours, we are its children, let us go and stop the holes.' Let us gladly do it with our heart's blood, and if we cannot then let us die. We will make a plug of our brains and put them into the ship; but condemn it never. Say not one harsh word against this society.'

His thought has also covered the social system and the need for its reconstruction to enable the masses to play their rightful role in the society. Speaking about the rigidity of Hindu society he said, 'Religion was never shackled. No man was ever challenged in the selection of his *istadeva* or his sect or his preceptor and religion grew, as it grew nowhere else. On the other hand, a fixed point was necessary to allow this infinite variation in religion, and society was chosen as that point in India. As a result society became rigid and almost immovable. For liberty is the only condition of growth.'

He was concerned with the caste system in India. The caste system continued to exist because of the mistaken notion of the reformers that caste was a religious institution, which led to their attacking religion in order to destroy caste. Religion was the special psyche of India and mixing up caste with religion only gave a longer life to the former. He pointed out that the doctrine of the caste on the Purusha-sukta of the Vedas does not make it hereditary. He asserted, 'Caste is a social custom and all our greatest preachers tried to break it down. Caste is simple and an outgrowth of the political institutions of India. It is a hereditary trade guild. It is the books written by priests that madness like that of caste is to be found and not in books revealed from God.' In a letter, he said, 'Religion has only to do with the soul and has no business to interfere in social matter.' In another letter he affirmed, In spite of all sayings of the priests caste is simply a systemised social institution, which after doing its service, is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench and it can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost social individuality.'

Writing from Almora in 1897, he said, ' The conviction is growing in my mind that idea of caste is the greatest dividing factor caste, either on the principles of birth or of merit, is bondage.'

Here the views of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who voiced against the caste system in India has similarity with Swamiji's thought. Dr. Ambedkar said that the caste system was a legal system maintained at the point of a bayonet. If it had survived it was due to prevention of the masses from the possession of arms, denying to masses the right to property. So he maintained that the Caste system far from natural was really an imposition by the ruling classes upon the servile class.

He again said, 'The caste system prevents common activity and by preventing it, it has prevented the Hindu from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being. There is only individual share or part in the associated activities.'

Gandhiji reiterated Swamiji's view and wrote in *Harijan*, 'Religion does not live by learning. It lives in the experience of saints, seers, in their lives and sayings. The law of *Varna* defines not our right, but our duty... a religion is judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced.' In London, Swamiji pointed out, 'The idea of privilege is the bone of human life. Two forces, as it were, are constantly at work, one making caste and other breaking caste, in other words, the one making for privilege and the other breaking down the privileges. And wherever privilege is broken down more and more light and progress came into race. The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege and through out the ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction. Let us work for that knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness towards all mankind.'

He strongly advocated for giving women their rightful place in society by removing their backwardness. He told the disciples, 'If you do not raise women who are the living embodiment of Divine

Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise.' He asserted that unless the conditions of women are improved in India, the country will continue to remain as backward as that moment. He wanted education to be available for women. He said, 'Educate, your women first and leave them to themselves, then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them.' All the mischief to women has come because men undertook to shape the destiny of women.'

Vivekananda believed that education is an instrument for human development. He wanted a thorough re-orientation of our educational system to make it an integrated man-making and character building system.

What passes for education today even in our best schools and colleges is a hopeless anachronism? Parents look to education to fit their children for life in the future. Teachers warn that lack of education will cripple a child's chances in the world of tomorrow, Governments, ministries, the mass-media-all exhort young people to stay in schools, insisting that now, as never before, one's future is almost dependant on education.

Today, the educational system is incoherent, directionless. We have to move the youth—the younger generation—the modern generation to the future. Swamiji said, 'Education is not the amount of information that is put in your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages of the world and encyclopaedias are the rishis. And again he said, 'To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collection of facts.'

He wanted to bring a new social order not by hatred, class war and materialistic dominance, but by love, work and religion. Hence, he said, 'If material wants are not removed by the rousing of intense activity, none will listen the words of spirituality. He believed in

human development, the goal of development was the perfection of man, the growth of goodness inherent in him. He always thought of individual in society and in relation to society but individual was both goal and instrument for development. In an interview to *Sunday Times*, London, in 1896, he said, 'The basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. No nation is great or good because parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good.'

Again he said, 'I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but a half loaf is better than no bread.'

'A time will come when there will be the rising of shudra class with their sudrahood will gain absolute supremacy in every society.' Nearly a century ago, he was concerning himself with changes about which we started talking much later and continue to talk today. He campaigned to abolish poverty, he pleaded for removal of mass illiteracy, spoke for the uplift of the backward classes and ending up caste tyranny. So, Swamiji was far ahead of his time in his concern for social change, and a rejuvenated Indian society.

How can this social change take place? He says, 'Before flooding India with socialist or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ides. And after preaching spiritual knowledge along with it will come that secular knowledge and every other knowledge that you want.' He wanted Vedanta to be the means for providing this fuel and by this process he brought, 'Vedantic Socialism' or ' Practical Vedanta' to masses which is a revolutionary concept. Soviet Scholar E.P. Chelishev, in his address ' Swami Vivekananda, the great Indian humanist, democrat and patriot' said, 'Vivekananda's greatest service is the development in his teaching of the lofty ideals of humanism, which incorporate the finest features of Indian culture. He tried to place religious ideology at the service of country's national interests, the emancipation of his enslaved compatriots.' And again he said, ' The great merit of Vivekananda, in my opinion, is that he

was one of the first in India to pay attention to the masses, to the suffering and misfortune of his compatriots thereby he raised the paramount problem of India.' All these calls, in my opinion, had only one purpose to inspire the people to fight for their rights, to instil in their hearts confidence, in their own strength. That is why we consider Vivekananda a fervent fighter against colonialism.'

Prof. Binoy Kumar Roy says, ' In spite of burning patriotism, deep sympathy for the toiling masses and his prophetic prediction that the future belongs to the toilers, the shudras, whose eyes have to be opened so that they can assert their rights, Vivekananda's programme of National regeneration is a halfway compromise.'

Vivekananda says that will be determined by the awakened masses themselves. 'His task,' said Vivekananda, 'is to rouse their consciousness about their own power. And there he stopped, did not proceed further to propose a concrete programme of mass action for the liberation of the country from the tentacles of exploitation. It is but natural that devoid of any concrete plan of action this programme was not suitable, acceptable from the political point of view.'

It is a fact that generations of young revolutionaries of India have taken their inspiration from the teachings of Vivekananda, but strongly enough they did not take the course of going to the masses and rousing them. Instead they took the line of armed insurrection to be conducted by small organised groups.

'Vivekananda's burning patriotism, his love and sympathy for the toiling millions not only of India but also of America (Negroes especially) and Europe, his scorn and hatred for the parasitic exploiting upper classes of India (feudal classes mainly) coupled with his vedantic conception of freedom of soul and universal brotherhood—all these helped Vivekananda to go a long way from the position of a disciple of Ramakrishna, an ordinary religious reformer, to one of the foremost thinkers of his period.

In his Madras address, Swamiji said, ' A man who has met starvation face to face for fourteen years of his life, who has not

known where he will get a meal the next day and where to sleep, cannot be intimidated so easily. A man almost without clothes, who dared to live where the thermometer registered thirty degrees below zero, cannot be so easily intimidated... I have a little will of my own. I have my little experience too, and I have a message for the world which I will deliver without fear and without care for the future.'

In Calcutta, at the civic reception at the residence of Raja Radha Kanta Dev Bahadur of Sobha Bazar, he observed, 'One of the great cause of India's misery and downfall has been that she narrowed herself, went into her shell, as the oyster does, and refused to give her jewels and her treasures to the other races of mankind, refused to give the life giving truth to nations outside the Aryan fold. That has been the one cause that we did not go out, that we did not compare notes with other nations, that has been the one great cause of our downfall and everyone of you knows that, that little stir, the little life you see in India, begins from the day when Raja Ram Mohan Roy broke through the walls of this exclusiveness. Since that day, history of India has taken another turn and now it is growing with accelerated motions.'

In his Madras speech, Vivekananda said, 'To the reformers, I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root and branch reform. Where we differ is in the method— I do not believe in reform, I believe in growth... this wonderful national machine has worked through ages, this wonderful river of national life is flowing before us – thousands of circumstances are crowding round it giving it a special impulse quicker at another... feed the national life with the fuel it wants, but the growth is its own... none can dictate its growth to it.'

Hence in the history of India's freedom movement a very special position is occupied by Swami Vivekananda. He was also the founder

of Ramakrishna Mission, a philanthropic organisation with centres throughout India as well as in America and England.

Swamiji said, 'This math will be central institution for the practice of religion and the cultivation of knowledge. The spiritual force emanating from here will permeate the whole world, turning the currents of men's activities and aspirations into new channels, from here will be disseminated ideals harmonizing Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga and Karma. The time will come when by the mere will of sannyasins of this math life will vibrate into the deadened souls of men. All these visions are rising before me.' His views and teachings greatly influenced the national movement of India, especially, the revolutionary movement, and many aspects of our national life and culture. Many generations of Indian revolutionaries beginning with the early 20^{th} century were practically reared up, inspired and steeled by the fiery speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda. His call to the youth of the country to fight for the enlightenment of millions, his revolutionary approach to the problem of liquidating the privileges of the rich and giving the toilers their due share in the national wealth, his preaching against untouchability and, above all, his teachings on the purification of the soul, were later adopted by different political and social organisations of the country including the Indian National Congress led by M. K. Gandhi.

'With his belief in man and his infinite perfectibility, he lived a life, however, which is witness to the realisation of man's total identification with all being and therefore of man's total identification with all being and therefore the impossibility of contentment with one's own,' said Professor Hiren Mukherjee. And it was Swami Vivekananda who came, as it were, to fulfil some of his India's deepest needs—the need of conscious activism and collective endeavour. Was it not Vivekananda's own voice which was heard ages ago in *Aitreya Brahmana*, 'Behold the beauty of the sun who never slept since the beginning of the creation – therefore move forward, move foreword (Caraivati! Caraivati!).'

Hence, Swamiji by brining Vedanta to practical life of the masses not only enriched the thoughts of our sages, seers, but influenced his own generation to which thinkers like Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Subhas, Ambedkar belonged. These became guiding principles for the present generation and become light for the generations to come.

And let that voice be re-echoed vigorously without the form and let us march with the rousing voice, 'Arise, awake.'

(Swami Vivekananda Extension Lecture, 1992, Utkal University)

POEM

A Dream Boat

Did you not tell me,
As we paced the
Wide yard of the jute mill
Along the banks of the Ganga
Looking at the garden
Where flowers of many colours
Bloomed,
'I love you.'

*   *   *

Your soft smile
Your sweet side-long glances
Filled my heart
With dreams
Made me weave a web
That kept unravelling
Like the Babri mosque,
A four-hundred year old edifice,
Coming down.

Your arms locked in mine
You sought to catch my dreams
While I wandered in the grassy Maidan
Looking for the place
Where death lay in wait for me.

I know
You don't love me
And yet you go around
Saying, 'I love you.'

I ride my dream boat
And sail down the Ganga
Watching Death
Lying so close to me.

Translated from the Oriya by Jatindra K. Nayak

Good Morning

Good morning, Sun God
Good morning, poets assembled here
Good morning, temple priest
Who has rubbed
Vermillion on temple stones
And put a garland of hibiscus flowers
On the neck of the goddess.

How beautiful this morning is
How lovely
And yet seems so quiet
So sullen.

Lumps of mud clinging to the car's wheel
Helpless like children in an orphanage
Haven't dried yet.

Yesterday
I had said, ' Good morning'
Today I woke up early
And said ' Good morning'.

The dry wick in the lamp
Burns feebly
Yet it does not feel humble
And is bent on destroying hibiscus flowers.

Good morning, Good morning
The sun has gone down
Long since
Why should Time bother

To find out
Why someone says, ' Good morning'
While plucking buds
From a hibiscus plant
It only smiles
With derision.

Translated from the Oriya by Jatindra K. Nayak

The Death of a Dog

Why should I worry
Because a hungry dog
Died by the wayside?

Why should I bother
If a hungry stray dog
Snatched away
Food from an orphaned boy
Lying by the road
Covered in rays
And resigned to fate?

The stray dog died
As the orphan boy watched
The capital city is full of stray dogs and orphans
There are many like us
Who find ourselves
Crushed
Every day
Under the wheels of progress
Fifteen years have gone by
Listening to empty speeches
Delivered by speakers
Adorned with garlands
And starched many-coloured scarves.

This child was born
Beside the railway line
As a train
Chugged by

And was
Quickly orphaned.

The wind blew his tattered shirt away
Like bits of paper
As he fought
To grab a food packet
Given away
On a day of public celebration.

Translated from the Oriya by Jatindra K. Nayak

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